

MINISTERING TO THE LEAST OF THEM: A TRANSFORMATIVE
MODEL FOR MISSION IN THE TWENTY-FIRST
CENTURY

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ABSTRACT

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A transformative model for holistic mission was designed and developed at the Greater Christian Unity Missionary Baptist Church in Robbins, Illinois. This project examined the current inadequate mission effort, especially toward the low income residents in the community. The researcher hypothesized that congregant's attitudes regarding mission change when they are educated; and that low income people can be evangelized when mission is intentional and holistic. The project utilized the qualitative research method. A twenty two member focus group was formed and pre and post surveys, questionnaires, and an exit interview were used to measure attitudes and effectiveness of the project.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to commence by thanking God for providing me with the strength to endure and complete this project. I would also like to thank my wife, kids and grandchildren for their patience throughout this intense process. I am also grateful to Pastor emeritus Jenkins, the late Mother Mary Jenkins and the entire Greater Christian Unity family for their prayers, encouragement and fiscal support. To my brother and extended family, I thank you for your phone calls and prayers.

In addition I offer special thanks to the participants, my professional and context associates, Rob Worley and Tina Hallinan for their tireless assistance. And last but certainly not least I am forever grateful to Dean Hudson and my mentors Dr. Daryl Hairston and Dr. Lucius Dalton for their patience, guidance and wealth of knowledge that they so freely shared.

INTRODUCTION

This project examines the importance of God's mission for the twenty first century church. The purpose of this project was to remind the Greater Christian Unity Missionary Baptist Church of her role in God's mission. The researcher, who has an affinity for those who are marginalized, began this project before he started the D. Min program at United Seminary but was sidetracked by his employment. The writer hypothesized that parishioners and community leaders alike responded positively to the needs of the less fortunate when they were better informed. This much needed collaboration will help with the revitalization of the poverty stricken community of Robbins, Illinois.

In chapter one, the researcher journals his spiritual formation from a young child until now, followed by a brief description of his current ministry context. He reflects on growing up in a small town with both parents who instilled in him and his brother the importance of having a solid relationship with God. He recalls how he watched his parents along with several other members of his church work tirelessly as it pertained to assisting those who were less fortunate. Hence, the researcher desired to create a model for mission that would transform the current efforts of the church by re-establishing biblical principles through practical teaching and preaching.

In chapter two, the researcher discusses the literature employed to support this ministry model. In his effort to design a holistic and transformative model for mission in the twenty- first century the researcher borrowed from several resources. He also notes

the importance of collaboration with the community through the efforts of noted authors such as David Bosch, Darrell Guder, Alan Hirsch and Mike Slaughter, and a few of their colleagues, whose expertise contributed to this researcher's understanding of what it means to be in mission with God.

He further highlights God's mission and the affect it has on the community by tracing the origin of mission through God's relationship with Israel, the incarnation of Jesus and the historical church.

In chapter three, the researcher provides the biblical, theological and historical foundations for this ministry project. The theoretical base for this model is transformation through participation. In this chapter, the researcher demonstrates God's mission through the lens of the Old Testament prophet Isaiah, who depicts God's concern for the downtrodden and poor people of Israel (Isa. 61:1-4). The New Testament example comes from Matthew 25, where Jesus stresses the importance of the Disciples (church) being active in God's mission toward the poor, marginalized and ignored. He also notes the role that Black liberation theology has played in the formation of this project. He concludes chapter three by discussing the historical origin of mission and its evolution through the years.

Chapter Four provides the reader with an in depth look at the methodology and research design that the researcher utilized to measure the attitudinal change of those in the focus group. The qualitative method was used to assess the data used in this project.

Chapter Five chronicles the field experience and the results of this endeavor. The information from the collected data will provide the readers with a model that can be

copied and used in their own contexts. The results of the field experience proved that community leaders and churches can work together when they share a common interest.

Chapter Six presents a summary and reflection of the challenges, both individual and corporate, that arise whenever there is change. This chapter also reveals the proposed model for mission in the twenty-first century. The researcher shares his thoughts as they pertain to the collaboration of church and community. The researcher further concludes that this project was successful for both the church and community because it provided a platform for continued communication between the two entities.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

The ministry focus of this project addresses the importance of the church's mission within the community. It also highlights God's intentional mission toward those who are less fortunate. The author opines that parishioners will do more when they are properly taught and that mission is more effective when there is collaboration between church and community.

Spiritual Autobiography

The Greater Christian Unity M.B. Church of Robbins, Illinois is pleased to announce that Elder Leandre Marshall, a native son, has accepted the call as her third Pastor and will be installed on June 5, 2010. Prior to being elected pastor, Leandre served in many capacities, with the most recent position being first assistant to the pastor. It was during this time that Leandre honed his pastoral skills under the tutelage of Pastor Jenkins, whose pastorate lasted thirty-six years. In addition to serving the church Leandre is active in the community and many other charity venues. He is a leader among his peers and is privileged to serve on the board of several nonprofit organizations. He has held several service oriented secular jobs, including his current position as a correctional officer with the Cook County Sheriff Department.

He was born on a warm August afternoon in the year 1962, to Jesse and Christine Marshall. They met through mutual friends and migrated from Georgia in pursuit of a

better life. Ironically, they settled in Robbins, a village that mirrored the small county where they were born. Leandre matriculated through the local school system and received several academic and athletic awards. His love for sports and the joy of competing compels him, even to this present time. He attended and graduated from Dwight D. Eisenhower High school in Blue Island, Illinois, where he lettered for four years on the basketball team. After high school, he received an athletic grant to Upper Iowa University, to continue his career and academics.

His career at Upper Iowa would be shortened by his failure to attend class and the news that his mother was ill. He would attend a couple of community colleges before finally enrolling at Chicago Baptist Institute, where he graduated with a degree in Theology and McCormick Theological Seminary (M.Div.). He is married to the former Vanessa Ford and together they have three children and seven grand children. He has been a participant on several interfaith colloquiums and a panelist at DePaul University on racism in the church. He is a mentor for at risk juveniles and an advocate for ex-offenders, mainly those who want to change their lives.

His job at the Department of Corrections and involvement within the church and community has been instrumental in his spiritual and social formation. His constant involvement with those who are incarcerated has humbled him by reminding him of how easy it is to lose ones freedom. He understands fully that God's grace has allowed him to serve those whose voice is silenced by their circumstances.

He and his brother were raised to honor God and respect everyone regardless of their ethnicity and socio-economic status. He observed his parents work tireless in the church and neighborhood, always striving to improve the lives of those who were less

fortunate. Similar to his parents he too is concerned about the lives of those who are marginalized and downtrodden. He knows firsthand what it feels like to be abused betrayed and oppressed by those you trust. He escaped gangs, drugs and racism but was the constant target of jokes, at least until he outgrew everyone, because of his protruding ears. He dreamed of getting out of Robbins, but God had other plans for him. He believes that God has strategically placed him in the poverty stricken village of Robbins, Illinois to make a difference.

Since 1996, when he accepted the call to ministry his desire has been to help those who are in need therefore, most of his interests and activities are ministry oriented. He enjoys fellowshiping with those whose interests are similar; however he also intentionally plans events that are inclusive of everyone, both in and outside the church. Although his primary employment is not ministry related, he is still able to find enjoyment by assisting those detainees who are ready to make a change. Consequently most of his readings and studies are in history, religion and counseling. He is interested in pastoral counseling addiction counseling, urban ministry and mentoring.

Hence, he believes it is important that Christians not only confess their belief, but more importantly that they live their faith which means practicing what is read and taught. He still lives by the principles that he learned as a child: trust in God, and respect for all humanity with love being the motivator, but the truth of the matter is, he did not really practice them until his call to seminary in 2002. It was there that Leandre discovered how to love all people regardless of their religion, sexuality and ethnicity.

As he grew in age and knowledge, it became apparent to him that faith in the Bible, especially the story of Jesus, meant that Christians were to emulate Jesus' words and deeds.

Likewise, these principles have also impacted his view of ministry in the twenty-first century. He understands that ministry means serving, both the church and the community however, as he looks at what's happening in the community, there is not much ministry being performed outside the church. He models his theology of ministry after what the Bible teaches, which in his estimation describes God as a God who is concerned about all humanity, particularly the down-trodden and less fortunate. God is so concerned about the well-being of humanity that God sends Jesus to dwell with humanity, who seemingly caters to those who are oppressed. Therefore ministry means intentionally reaching out beyond the church. That does not mean neglecting those in need within the church, but it does suggest that ministry should not be exclusive.

In his present ministry setting those in the community are routinely forgotten. This reality is admittedly troubling for this writer. To overcome this Leandre frequently speaks with those who live in the housing projects so they will know that there is hope. He also sponsors a few of the kids in the youth football league, and gives away food baskets on a small scale. The researcher enjoys seeing the joy that these small acts bring to those who otherwise would feel neglected. For him the greatest success is to see people accept the salvation that is offered through Jesus. However, he also enjoys seeing the smiles on their faces when they receive a visit or some kind of gift from the church.

Through his parents teachings he learned at an early age the importance of not only confessing your faith but living it by serving others. With love and respect as his

motivators, he is more determined than ever to carry out God's mission for the church,- mission that includes those who are marginalized, disenfranchised and ignored by mainstream society.

Context

Greater Christian Unity Missionary Baptist Church, located in the historic village of Robbins, Illinois was organized in 1968 as a mission by a group of seven who were fed up with the leadership in their original church. After the membership grew from the original seven to thirty five, they decided to incorporate as a church, with the intent of making a difference in the community. The constitution and by-laws, which has not changed much in forty- three years, describe her as a church whose mission is to propagate the gospel and to aid those who are less fortunate. In her formative years she was active in both home and foreign mission. The church, because of the efforts of the women, was more active than many of the larger churches.

The church is one of forty four (44) in the village that has a population of 6,135. Throughout her history, Greater Christian Unity has served as a refuge for those experiencing difficult times. Whether it was through financial support, food gifts or the use of her facilities for funerals, weddings and other events, people in the community could depend on Greater Christian Unity to lend a helping hand. The village has a 97% African American population and is a part of U.S. history. According to the village website Robbins is the oldest black governed incorporated town in the northern United States and was the home of the first black built and owned airport.

Robbins has also produced several famous celebrities including actresses, Nichelle Nichols and KeKe Palmer, basketball star Dwayne Wade and actor Lawrence Tero(Mr.T). In spite of its place in history, the 2000 census reported that 35% of the current population lives beneath the poverty line.¹ Greater Christian Unity is similar to most Baptist churches in that it is autonomous, sometimes to a fault. The church has experienced many setbacks over the years, yet it continues to persevere. The first pastor Dr. E Gray was called to a church in Gary, Indiana and left the young congregation after six months.

After a yearlong search, the Reverend B. Jenkins, a young charismatic preacher from Louisiana, was called and installed in April of 1970. Pastor B. Jenkins was not only an anointed preacher, but an astute businessman who introduced many new ideas. Because of his business savvy, Pastor B. Jenkins was able to secure bank funding for construction, much needed furnishings and appliances. Hence, the congregation was excited again and as a result the membership grew from thirty- five to over one- hundred during his tenure.

However, their joy would soon turn to sorrow when Pastor B. Jenkins similar to his predecessor, was called to the St. Paul Baptist Church in Gary Indiana. Greater Christian Unity released him in December 1973 and the search for a new pastor was initiated. The search was heated at times, as several members of the committee submitted names of family members and friends; nevertheless the search would last only four months.

In April of 1974, the Reverend L.V. Jenkins, no relation to Rev. B. Jenkins, was called and installed on the third Sunday. The new pastor was more traditional than his

¹ "U.S. Census Bureau," <http://censtat.census.gov/data/II/60174616>.

predecessor, however, the membership increased to one-hundred and seventy- five. The church and its pastor were invited to participate in several venues in and out of state. In addition, the choir won several awards, which led to an influx of young people, particularly thirteen to eighteen year olds joining the church. Similarly, the Sunday school and bible classes were vibrant and as a result the congregation experienced its greatest spiritual growth in years. The increase in members would lead to the formation of several new ministries, some of which were intentionally designed to include the community, and for many years the church was a lighthouse for those within the village of Robbins.

The relationship between the church and village would thrive until the mid-1980s when most of the younger congregants left for college, married or stopped attending. And the older ones began to die or relocate to other cities and senior citizen facilities. Subsequently, the decline in membership resulted in the dissolution of many of the programs that were outreach focused, thus leaving the community with one less resource. This decline continued until early 1990, when the membership bottomed out at approximately ninety. Most of those who remained were more content with just coming to church than they were with outreach, which caused the congregation to wander in the wilderness of stagnation for ten years.

Similarly, the village of Robbins was experiencing its own financial hardship. Several of the businesses that were so important to the village's existence closed; the one clinic moved and the emergency response team was dismantled. The sole village grocer raised prices and sold substandard products, yet the people continued to buy because the store allowed them to buy on credit. The unemployment rate was high due to the closing

of the mills in both Indiana and Chicago. As a result, the crime rate went up, the sale and use of drugs increased and more gangs migrated to the village because of the lack of police services. This once historical and close knit community had become a vast wasteland.

According to the 2000 census, the population is currently 6,135 with 97% being African American, 2% white and 1% other. The report reveals an unemployment rate of 37%, with 35% living beneath the poverty level, and 30% of the 1,985 households being led by single parents under the age of 44.² Similarly, the church membership has become older, with 55.2% being over fifty and living on a fixed income. The percentage of single parents living beneath the poverty level is expected to grow in future years as more displaced low income people move into the few available and livable properties.

The demographics continued to change drastically over the next few years. The population, which once peaked at 10,000, was now closer to 6,000. Hence, the churches began to feel the effects with a few closing their doors. The congregants that stayed did more so out of loyalty to their ancestors, many of whom were founding members. The author's home church Greater Christian Unity would also feel the effects of the village demise, but fortunately the church began to experience a rebound of sorts in 2000, when Pastor L.V. Jenkins made an intentional effort to include the younger congregants in the worship planning.

It was also during this time that Pastor L.V. Jenkins named this author as his first assistant, with the task of evangelizing the community and surrounding areas. Since that time, forty new members have joined, and the outreach ministry is once again operable. However, this author cannot rest knowing that there is still a lot of work left to do.

² U.S. Census Bureau, <http://censtat.gov/data/II60174616> (accessed March 10,2010).

Therefore, the Outreach Ministry is currently being revamped to provide both social and religious services. The efforts of the outreach team have produced fruits throughout the congregation, with the greatest improvement being in the 19-49 age group. Because of her giving spirit, many low income single parents attended regularly and many would eventually join the church, and Greater Christian Unity experienced a growth spurt. Furthermore low income people moved into the few available and livable properties.

This once proud and historic village, which is home to the first black built and owned airport and celebrities such as, Nichelle Nichols, KeKe Palmer, Dwayne Wade, Mr. T and S.B. Fuller, is now a community of vacant and abandoned buildings, gangs and drugs. Despite its fame and history, Robbins, according to its website is the fourth poorest community in southern Cook County, with a median income of \$24,559.³ Although there has been some improvement in recent years with the construction of a few new homes, the outlook for the village is still dismal, as the chasm between the church and community continues to grow. Subsequently, those living in poverty are continually neglected.

However, this trend can be reversed if the members are informed and reminded of its mission, and there is a serious effort by the powers to be to bring more resources into the community. Nancy Ammerman and her colleagues maintain that present procedures can not be altered without first looking at current conditions.⁴ Hence, collaboration initially, between Greater Christian Unity and the village, and eventually other churches is vitally important to the survival of the community. Such collaboration

³ [www.city-widedata.com. http:// www.city-wide data.com/neighborhood/Robbins,IL](http://www.city-widedata.com/neighborhood/Robbins,IL).(accessed February 22,2011).

⁴ Nancy Ammerman, *Studying Congregations A New Handbook* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 108.

would allow for resources to be combined, which would provide the community with much needed assistance. This may prove to be an arduous task, but the possibility of lives being changed is worthy of the church's attention.

THE CONJUNCTION

Perhaps the researcher was allowed to grow up in a historically rich but economically deprived community so that he could experience firsthand the struggles of the less fortunate, while never lacking. Being a product of the community and a life-long member of Greater Christian Unity has afforded Leandre an opportunity to develop relationships with key governmental officials, several pastors and long time residents. It is the author's desire to offer those in need a holistic approach toward their restoration, based on Scripture. He surmises that people are more receptive to church, when they know that the church is concerned about their well being.

This belief is based on his experience as a kid and then teen growing up in Robbins, Illinois, a small community whose residents, including this author's parents settled because of its resemblance to their beloved southern homes. Because of its southern roots, the community was close knit and concerned about each other's well being. If a family needed assistance the people in the churches and community would pool their resources to make sure the family need was met.

This author can remember when his mother would take food that she had stored for the winter from our freezer and give to those families on our block whose food supply was low or in some cases depleted. She would later join with other women to form a food

pantry for our block so food was available all year for those who were in need. This band of women also assisted younger women by providing clothes and babysitting services.

This author's home church, under the leadership of Reverend L.V. Jenkins often spearheaded events such as feeding the hungry, back to school fest and adopt a child for Christmas. These events would continue annually until 1980, when many of the older members retired or died and others moved away. During this same time period the mills begin to slow down and many of the men were laid off causing the economic landscape to change drastically in both the community and the church. This downward spiral eventually reached epidemic levels. This once proud afro-American community, which produced many notable athletes and movie stars, was now on the verge of bankrupt.

Fortunately, this author's church, with assistance from several committed congregants and two wealthy uncles thrived in their mission efforts. It was during this time that the author began to assist his parents and the church in their mission efforts, by packaging and transporting food and clothing to the various homes. The smiles on the faces of the people were worth more than money. For the first time in the author's life the Bible became real. Hence a passion for mission had developed.

This passion lasted until the fall of 1980, when he left for Upper Iowa University on an athletic grant ,with the intent to major in accounting and eventually starting his own firm. But things soon changed for the worst when he began to sow wild oats with the others in his circle. Instead of focusing on classes and basketball, he was content to hang out with those whose main purpose it seemed was to party every day. Consequently his desire to aid the less fortunate fell by the wayside. The passion he had experienced while assisting his parents would lay dormant for several years as he wandered around with

blindfold covering his eyes, trying to decipher what to do with his life; church and mission were the furthest things from his mind.

This period of uncertainty would last until April 13, 1991 when he rededicated his life to Christ. Soon after, he was selected by the pastor to join the deacon board and teach Sunday school. He immersed himself in the Bible and bought books on how to be a deacon in the black church, with the hope of making a difference. This would prove to be an arduous task since the other deacons had more experience. Their experience and age would serve as a hindrance both personally and corporately. Because of their refusal to embrace change, the visitation of the sick and the care of the elderly, which consisted among other things of taking them to the doctor and pharmacy, fell on the Mission Society.

In a normal situation this would have been perfect, but the author's context was imperfect, because those who served on the mission were themselves elderly and dependent on others for assistance. Mission for them was simply meeting on the second Saturday of the month and discussing a lesson from their books. With the exception of a quarterly monetary gift to those who were homebound due to sickness this was the extent of mission in the author's context. This reality troubled the author because the church is a Missionary Baptist Church, which suggests that there is some type of mission being performed on a continuous basis. He surmises that if a church is going to emulate the ministry of Jesus, it has to begin and end with mission.

He draws his conclusion from Luke 4:18, where Jesus references Isaiah 61, by claiming that the Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to

the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised.⁵

Although this text occurs in Nazareth, it could easily be Robbins.

The village which now has a population of 6,135 is the fourth poorest town in Cook County. The latest census data report that the current unemployment rate of 39% is more than three times that of the city of Chicago. There are 448 poverty stricken families with children between the ages of 5 and 18. There are 212 of the 448 or 44% that are single parent families with income 50% below the poverty level.⁶ In a related survey conducted between 2005 and 2009 the census report that 192 single parent families rely solely on Supplemental Security Income and public assistance income.⁷ Many of those in this group reside in one of the two housing projects that are located directly across the street from the author's church and within one and one half miles from six of the forty-four other churches, but regrettably only twelve families for a total of twenty-two persons attend the author's church.

The village, which has limited resources and facilities, is unable to provide extended assistance. In the past, before the economy turned downwards, CEDA utilized an old schoolhouse, which has since closed, to feed those in need and the village sponsored different charitable events at the community/ recreation center. However, the center, with the exception of the gymnasium, is in need of a major overhaul, but with no funds available in the budget this is highly unlikely. Meanwhile, the six churches in close

⁵Luke.4:18 Unless stated otherwise all scripture is from the King James Version.

⁶ U.S. Bureau of the Census 2000.

⁷ [Http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/STTable?_bm=y&-geo_id+16000US1764616&-qr_name+ACS_2009](http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/STTable?_bm=y&-geo_id+16000US1764616&-qr_name+ACS_2009)

proximity to the housing projects all have dining and common areas that could be utilized for different mission activities.

Instead of hoping that the people will come, this author agrees with Ronald Sider, who suggests that just as Christ was sent on a mission to make a difference, that “Christ in us impels us to move outside our comfortable rural or suburban communities (churches) to stand and cry and labor with him among those yearning to be free.”⁸ Siders’ presumption suggests that mission should be both word and action. In doing so he emulates what Jesus conveys in the book of Matthew, when he says “whatever you have done to the least of them, you have done to me.”⁹

In that periscope, Jesus is suggesting that the mission of the church is multifaceted. Not only is it about food and clothing, it is also about the spiritual, social and emotional wellbeing of those who are poor. Jesus conveys that the church’s mission is both holistic and developmental. Jean-Paul Heldt offers insight into this viewpoint by claiming “humans are multidimensional, physical, mental, social and spiritual, therefore mission cannot be anything less.”¹⁰

Consequently, the author knows the residents concerns include better schools, more programs for children, a healthcare facility and adequate food and clothing for those who are a part of the housing projects. Although Greater Christian Unity cannot assist the entire community, she can assist those in the housing projects who have been labeled the neediest, especially those twelve families who are a part of the author’s congregation.

⁸ Ronald J. Sider. *One-Sided Christianity: Uniting The Church To Heal A Lost And Broken World* (Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1993), 146.

⁹ Matt. 25:40 unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are from the King James Version.

¹⁰ Jean Paul Heldt, “Revisiting the Whole Gospel: Toward a Biblical Model of Holistic Mission in the 21st Century,” *Missiology* 32 2004: 151-172.

With that in mind this author is prepared to move forward with God's mission for him and the Greater Christian Unity Church. His synergy is derived from being raised in a family that believed in helping the less fortunate and attending a church that has been and remains a vital part of the community.

Therefore this project will focus on those single parent families, who are living beneath the poverty level. The Greater Christian Unity Church will collaborate with the community by allowing her dining and common areas to be utilized as a food pantry and temporary shelter. In return, the village would supply food, other supplies and the use of the recreation center, namely the gym for concerts and revivals. This author agrees with Heldt's conclusion, "the church must be holistic in her mission."¹¹ She has to minister to the human need as well as the spiritual.

With nearly half of the population dependent upon some type of public assistance, it is the perfect opportunity for the church to make an impact through its mission efforts. Therefore it is with great joy that this researcher accepts the call and challenge to pastor the Greater Christian Unity M.B. Church, to lead her through her transformation into a missional church.

This model will provide a manual that will transform Greater Christian Unity into a missional church, one that attends to the whole person, with the hope of making disciples and fulfilling the commission found in Matthew "to go and make disciples,"¹² which is the ultimate mission of the church.

With the closing of the steel mills and factories many of the men found themselves unemployed, thus families had to rely on government assistance, just to have

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Matthew 28:19

the basic food necessities. This unfortunate turn of events provided an excellent opportunity for the faith community to partner with the few social agencies. And Greater Christian Unity was in the forefront offering a helping hand to many in the community. Whether it was through food baskets, clothes giveaway, help with utilities or school supplies, Greater Christian Unity was an active participant.

Sadly, this exhibition of compassion and concern would come to an abrupt halt as the elder members begin to retire, re-locate and die. It appeared that those who remained were content with just coming to church and reserving (sharing) resources for those who were members. This indifference led to many of the needy families, especially those living below the poverty line in the housing projects, to migrate to neighboring Indiana for help. Moreover, the inactivity of the church has caused many of the people in the community to view the church as irrelevant. Perhaps this disconnect is the result of mission, being viewed as something that is done, rather than the mandate of God.

While we continue to fellowship with the same people every Sunday, which is not a bad thing, those who are living below the poverty level are still in need of food, clothing, school supplies and assistance with their utilities. The persistent problem is that the members have withdrawn from the community, leaving the residents near the church with little or no hope. The church for the most part has no motivation, lacks passion and in some instances is nothing more than a social club. The only social agency in the community is the WIC office which serves six other communities. As a result, many of the residents have to wait in excess of sixty days to receive minimal food and health services. Perhaps many, especially the older congregants, feel as though the church should not be involved in the secular and social interests of her members.

Therefore, this project will serve as a manual for the leaders and the members of Greater Christian Unity, whose desire is to become missional. This project will also prove beneficial for the community in that it will provide an avenue for collaboration between the church and leaders in the community, which is desperately needed. Because Robbins is an underprivileged and underserved community, its only chance for survival and renewal lies in the hands of church and community leaders working together for all the citizens, particularly those without a voice. The miscommunication and in some cases non-communication of the church has plagued this community for years, and led to the disassociation of many of the residents with the local church. Hopefully this project will awaken and provoke the sleeping giant known as Greater Christian Unity to be more compassionate toward the underprivileged.

This project is not a cure all; rather, it is a small tool that will educate the congregation (disciples) on the importance of being missional and collaborative in the twenty- first century and beyond. Hence, this project will ultimately transform both the church and community, subsequently adding new disciples to Greater Christian Unity.

CHAPTER TWO

The State of The Art in this Ministry Model

The understanding of mission has evolved through the years from being something the church does to what is now known as being missional. This fairly new concept is described by George Hunsberger as being the manner of church life and identity; the essential character of the church.¹ With that in mind this chapter focused on the evolution of mission from being solely spiritual into a holistic process that encumbrance the whole being. The writer believes that education is paramount as it pertains to the missional transformation that is needed in the twenty first century.

To assist in the transformation of his context, and the success of this project, the researcher employed the expertise of people such as David Bosch, Darrell Guder, Alan Hirsch, and a few of their contemporaries. The topic of being missional is one that deserves continuous review because of its impact on both the church and the community. The researcher estimates that more and more communities will turn to the church for collaboration in providing assistance to those who are misaligned. Hunsberger maintains the missional church is proactive when it comes to providing assistance. He says:

It is not possible for a church genuinely gripped and constantly being changed by the gospel of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus to live in general isolation from the pain and brokenness of the world, or worse, in some aloof refusal to be responsive. Not if it knows the God of the Bible who comes to reign with grace

¹ George R. Hunsberger: *Features of the Missional Church: Some Directions and Pathways* (Holland, MI: Western Seminary, 1998), 5.

and to reconcile human affairs to the justice, peace, and joy that are God's own qualities.²

In essence Hunsberger suggests that the church of the twenty first century needs to analyze her current mission practices to see if they are in compliance with God's mission, which extends to all of humanity, especially those who are living in poverty. The current trend of the church offer the possibility of prosperity, with no concern it seems to those who cannot put five hundred dollars in the offering plate, nor can they send a seed offering for a prayer cloth that allegedly changes their financial and health conditions. This is in contrast to what the church should be doing, consequently many in the community never hear about the good of the church rather their views are contorted by what they see on television. Hence the idea of the church being in mission with God for the wellbeing of humanity has dissipated.

The question before the church of the twenty first century has to be how to design a model for mission that emulates God's mission. To accomplish this we turn first to David J. Bosch. In his book *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*; Bosch traces the origin and history of mission from God's interaction with Israel until the twentieth century. He concludes by offering a paradigm that is holistic and relevant. Bosch contends that the church is facing a crisis as it pertains to mission. Even though the understanding of mission evolved from the middle ages, where it was understood as the Trinity at work among humanity into the sending of missionaries to foreign countries it still needed in Bosch's estimation some fundamental changes.³

² Ibid., 11.

³ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 2.

These changes were necessitated by the myriad of social, political, theological and racial factors in North America and abroad. Because of the above factors mission was viewed through antiquated traditions that often neglected those who were marginalized. In addition Bosch also maintains that technology and science played a major part in this crisis because people believed they were equipped to handle things on their own. Thus there was no need to have faith in God.⁴

To overcome this deficit and enhance mission the Church must look critically at what it has traditionally done and be willing to change. To overcome the present crisis Bosch maintains the church must direct its focus in these three areas: the foundation, the motives and aim, and the nature of mission.⁵

The Foundation of Mission

The obvious foundation for Christian mission is the bible. Any attempt at transforming God's mission for the church void the Scripture leads to a dysfunctional mission or worst no mission effort at all. To explain this theory Bosch enlisted the help of Gustav Warneck and Julius Schmidlin, both of whom are considered the founders of their respective missiology.⁶

Bosch asserts it was Warneck who suggested that mission has a dual foundation. He describes the two elements as being supernatural and natural. He claims:

⁴ Ibid., 3-4.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., 4.

The supernatural element of mission is founded on Scripture, particularly the “Great Commission” and on the monotheistic nature of the Christian faith.... Whereas the natural is based on the following: (a) the absoluteness and superiority of the Christian religion compared to others; (b) the acceptability and adaptability of Christianity to all peoples and all conditions; (c) the superior achievements of the Christian mission on the “mission fields”; and (d) the fact that Christianity has in past and present, shown itself to be stronger than all other religions.⁷

The import of Scriptures for mission was an integral part of past mission efforts and remains paramount for the transformation of the twenty first century church. Darrell Guder, a contemporary of Bosch, supports this notion by suggesting that any serious discussion of mission must be centered on Scripture, especially the gospel which depicts God’s mission through the life death and resurrection of Christ. Guder states:

Whatever one believes about the church needs to be found in and based on what the Bible teaches. Moreover, these biblical perspectives need to be made explicit. The biblical witness is appropriately received as the testimony to God’s mission and the formation of God’s missionary people to be the instruments and witnesses of that mission.⁸

Mike Slaughter, a graduate of United Seminary and a local Pastor ascribes to this idea by asserting that mission centers on the following three biblical mandates:

The Great Requirement, recorded in Micah 6 where the people of God are required to extend justice to all people, especially the poor and marginalized. (2) The Great Commandment of John 15 where the disciples are instructed to love each other and all people. And, (3) The Great Commission in Matthew 28, which authorizes the disciples to act as agents in God’s mission.⁹

These authors concur that any understanding and transformation of mission must begin with Scripture. This includes the training of church members as well as the evangelization of those outside the church. The church may have to use different methods

⁷ Ibid., 8.

⁸ Darrell L. Guder, *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 11.

⁹ Mike Slaughter, *Change the World: Recovering the Message and Mission of Jesus* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2010), 17-22.

to train and add disciples but these methods should be biblically sound and void of imposition and trickery.

Motives and Aim

What is the motive and aim for mission? Is it to just to add numbers to the church role? Is it to build fine church buildings? Or is it to convert people of other faiths? Are all motives clear of unduly influence from church leaders? These are just a few of the questions that the church must ask during its missional evaluation. Bosch admits that the church's motives have not always been pure or clear, rather there were instances when the motives were impure.¹⁰ To highlight these impurities, Bosch borrows from J. Verkuyl who claims the motives and aim for mission are inseparable.

Verkuyl notes that the four impure motives of the past were the imperialist motive; the cultural motive; the romantic motive and the motive of ecclesiastical colonialism.¹¹ It should be mentioned that all of these motives dealt with the church trying to impose, sometimes forcibly, its beliefs on other cultures. This practice continued throughout much of the church history. As a matter of fact one could argue that this practice was also the cause of many rejecting Christianity for other religions.

In addition Bosch lists four more motives, which he claims are theologically sound. The list includes the following: (a) motive of conversion, which emphasizes the value of personal decision and commitment but tends to neglect the reign of God; (b) the

¹⁰ Bosch, 5.

¹¹ J. Verkuyl, *Contemporary Missiology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Press, 1978), 168-175.

eschatological motive, which fixes people eyes on the reign of God as a future event but has no interest in the current exigencies of this life; (c) the motive of church planting, which stresses the need for community and an identity with the kingdom of God; and (d) the philanthropic motive, through which the church is challenged to seek justice in the world.¹² These motives offered the church a new perspective for mission yet they were not a cure all for the mission crisis that the church faced.

Mike Slaughter strengthens this view by conveying that many have become disenfranchised with church because of the antiquated and irrelevant motives. Slaughter speaks from his personal experience as a Pastor who employed some questionable motives in filling the sanctuary. Slaughter admits that his motive was to attract people as other churches were doing. To accomplish this He says:

The mantra was build it and they will come. So we built quality programming for every age and life stage...the church mastered slick marketing campaigns and built buildings that resembled shopping malls; and designed worship services that were akin to sitting in the local bars.¹³

Similar to other churches during the late 1990's Ginghamburg, Slaughter's home church experienced great growth. It appeared that the theory of giving the people what they wanted was working fine. What church does not want growth? Slaughter confessed that attraction evangelism had done a good job of filling the pews, but failed when it came to transforming the secular worldview of the parishioners.¹⁴ They were a part of the church but there was no change in their behavior. This type of experience is all too

¹² Bosch, 5.

¹³ Slaughter, 10.

¹⁴ Ibid, 11.

common in the Church. Many churches do a good job of attracting new converts, but very few, at least from the researcher's point of view, produce disciples.

Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, in their book *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the Twenty First Century Church* contend the church does not need more faddish motives; rather its aim should be to seek God's missional direction for the church and community; for the sake of transforming both.¹⁵ Bosch adds these motives and aims leads to an unsatisfactory missionary practice.¹⁶ The ideology behind these motives, are in contrast to the motive and aim of Jesus, whose mission is best described in Luke 4 (cf. Isa. 61:1-4). A close read of the Luke text reveals that Jesus had a clear and concise motive. His one aim was to transform lives, particularly those who were oppressed.

In his book *One Sided Christianity: Uniting The Church To Heal A Lost And Broken World*, Ronald J. Sider, a strong supporter of this thought maintains Jesus' mission challenged the evils of the status quo by announcing that the messianic kingdom was open to those who were downtrodden and poor.¹⁷ It is worth noting that Jesus' motive was pure. There was no trickery involved he simply offered people a holistic view of mission. This model for mission got side tracked somewhere between Nazareth and North America, for one that mimicked other venues. Sider insists that faithful Christian

¹⁵ Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the Twenty First Century Church* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003), 7.

¹⁶ Bosch, 5.

¹⁷ Ronald J. Sider, *One Sided Christianity: Uniting The Church To Heal A Lost And Broken World* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1993), 62.

sharing, the proclamation of the gospel which illumines Jesus' mission toward the marginalized, weak, crippled and socially ostracized is the true mission of the church.¹⁸

To better understand this point of view we turn again to Bosch who stresses that it is Luke who portrays the proper motive and aim for mission. According to Bosch, Luke's writings stand out because they show the church unique mission to those who had been neglected because of their ethnicity, gender and social status.

Bosch states as Luke retells the story of Jesus and the early church there are certain themes he repeats again and again: the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the centrality of repentance and forgiveness, of prayer, of love, and acceptance of enemies, of justice and fairness in inter- human relationships.¹⁹

These themes are the empowering factors that enable the church to be in mission with God. They are also instrumental for the transformation of antiquated and self-guided ideologies that continue to plague the church, even today. When compared to the early church, particularly the one hundred and twenty in Acts 1 who left the prayer meeting with new insight, instructions and pure motives, the postmodern church appear to have lost focus. Unfortunately, the ones who have been affected the most are the poor, weak, crippled, unemployed and every other marginalized group.

Bosch maintains that the church must intentionally aim for those who are a part of the minority sects of society. For Luke this was the poor. But not just the materialistic poor as we might think. Rather the poor included those who were emotionally poor, spiritually poor and socially poor. Hence the motive for mission was to reconcile the whole being not just the spiritual component. And the aim was inclusive of all people.

¹⁸ Ibid., 64.

¹⁹ Bosch, 86.

The Nature of Mission

Similar to his stance on the foundation and motives and aim of mission, Bosch strongly expresses his belief on the nature of mission against the present crisis. Bosch argues that if the foundation is unstable and motives and aim are ambiguous that the nature of mission also suffers.²⁰ To strengthen his argument he employs the assistance of Leslie Newbigin's book, *The Finality of Christ*. Newbigin asserts the new churches were smaller replicas of the home church, thus if the home church foundation was shaky, so were the new church plants; likewise if their motives and aim were unclear so were the new churches.²¹

Another author Paul Schultz equates the missionary nature of the church as "a lunatic who carries the harvest into a burning barn."²² Even though the church was busy doing missions, its overall missional nature was undefined. Bosch echoes schultz by claiming the problem was not outside but inside the church, with its varying definitions of mission.²³ Bosch blames the current crisis on our forebears, who failed to discern that they were in a crisis. Bosch proclaims that the church cannot ignore the crisis or hope it disappear, rather it must deal with it without succumbing to the temptation to return to earlier practices.²⁴

²⁰ Ibid., 5.

²¹ Leslie, Newbigin: *The Finality of Christ* (London: SCM Press, 1969), 107.

²² Bosch, 5.

²³ Ibid, 6.

²⁴ Ibid, 7.

The nature of the church's mission is intrinsically bound to God's activities with humanity first through Israel and afterwards through Jesus and the church. However Bosch suggests that the church cannot rest on past accomplishments; instead it must refine mission through the lens of past paradigms and devise a plan for the postmodern age. Leslie Newbigin joins the conversation again with another book titled *Trinitarian Faith and Today's Mission*. In this book Newbigin reminds the reader that mission is best understood when it is viewed as God's initiative, Theocentric in nature and not an activity that the church does.²⁵

To confront the crisis and move forward, Bosch opines that the church must evaluate the plethora of mission and missionaries, the crisis of the present church, and to some degree the anticipated view of the future church in order to develop a paradigm that is representative of God's mission.²⁶ To illustrate his theory Bosch begins by giving what he calls an "interim definition of mission."²⁷ Bosch's definition contains several points, each is relevant toward understanding the nature of mission, but for the sake of this project the writer will condense each point.

Bosch defines mission as:

(1) The Christian faith is missionary, thus it sees all generations of the earth as objects of God's salvific will and plan. (2) Missiology seeks to look at the world from the perspective of commitment to the Christian faith. (3) Mission remains undefinable; it should never be incarcerated in our own narrow predilections. (4) Christian mission gives expression to the dynamic relationship between God and the world, particularly as this was portrayed, first, in the story of the covenant people of Israel and then, supremely, in the personage of Jesus. (5) The Bible is not to be treated as a storehouse of truths on which we draw at random; our missionary practice is not performed in unbroken continuity with the biblical

77. ²⁵ Leslie, Newbigin: *Trinitarian Faith and Today's Mission* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1964),

²⁶ Bosch, 8.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

witness. Rather it is executed in the context of tension between divine providence and human confusion. (6) The church begins to be missionary not through its universal proclamation of the gospel, but through the universality of the gospel it proclaims. (7) Foreign mission is not a separate entity, thus the nature is the same as home mission... the universality of salvation and the indivisibility of the reign of Christ. (8) We have to distinguish between Gods' mission (misso Dei) and missions. Mission is God's self-revelation as the One who loves the world.... God is a God for people who embraces both the church and the world. Whereas missions is what the church does as it participates in God's mission. (9) The missionary task is as coherent, broad and deep as the need and exigencies of human life. (10) Mission is God's yes to the world and reveals itself in the church's missionary action towards those who are oppressed, living in poverty or facing some form of injustice. (11) Mission includes evangelism as one of its essential dimensions. It is the proclamation of salvation in Christ.....calling those who do not believe into repentance and conversion and inviting them to become living members of Christ's earthly community. (12) Mission is also God's no to the world as an expression of our opposition to and engagement with the world. Our identity is tied to Jesus and not the affairs of the world that we are called to confront. (13) The church in mission is a sign, symbol or model of what is to come. Living in the tension of, at the same time, being called out of the world and sent into the world, it is challenged to be God's experimental garden on earth.²⁸

From this definition it becomes obvious to this writer that the church has a great responsibility to the world as we proceed further into the twenty first century. If Bosch's definition is correct any effective model for mission should contain several of the elements that he names. And that any model that does not include Christ is not really viable. Darrell Guder posits before the church is called to do or say anything it is called and sent to be the people who lives under God's reign.²⁹ With that in mind the church is ready to produce a new paradigm for the twenty first century, which in Bosch's estimation expands on the paradigms of the past. Hence there is a correlation between what has been done and what needs to be done going forward.

²⁸ Ibid., 8-11.

²⁹ Guder, 103.

Solution To Crisis

The success of mission cannot properly be measured by the size of the congregation neither can it be measured by the amount of money spent on fine buildings and all the latest media gadgets. Although these things are needed they are not the ends by which mission is viewed. Consequently the solution for the present crisis can only be solved when the Church resolves to return back to God's plan for God's church. This does not mean that the church should become regressive as it pertains to mission, but it does suggest that the church needs to analyze current trends and discern which are conducive for mission.

Given the current economic conditions, the writer opines that any model for mission need to be inclusive of all the parishioners not just the mission society. Far too long the bulk of mission has been relegated to a few of the elderly, mostly women disciples who are faithful and sincere, but lack the energy necessary to carry mission beyond the four walls of the church and its immediate community. With that in mind Bosch proposes that the new paradigm must be interdependent.....the individual is not a nomad but part of an organism; only together is there salvation and survival.³⁰ Bosch's proposal closely resembles God's initial plan in that it is inclusive of the Church, God's voice for this present time, and the community. The fact of the matter is the church and community, need each other to survive. The survival that Bosch talks about is contingent upon the churches combining their resources to assist the community. This is especially true for the village of Robbins, where the researcher's church is situated.

³⁰ Bosch, 362.

Bosch's new paradigm is a multifaceted model which requires a collaborative effort among all churches. Bosch maintains the church can overcome its present mission crisis by being ecumenical. Bosch estimates this new paradigm began emerging in the middle of the twentieth century, with Vatican II and the convergence of Catholic and Protestant ecclesiologies.³¹ The two entities made a concerted attempt to develop a model that would encompass the whole of God's mission. They agreed that the emerging church had to be missionary. According to Bosch this means the church is sent out to be a partner in God's Mission. Bosch states its mission is not secondary to its being; the church exists in being sent and in building up itself for the sake of its mission.³²

Leslie Newbigin in his book *One Body, One Gospel, One World*, conveys the church must distinguish its missionary dimension from its missionary intention.³³ Bosch elaborates further on this distinction by stating the following:

The missionary dimension of a local church's life manifests itself, among other ways, when it is truly a worshipping community; it is able to welcome outsiders and make them feel at home; ...its members are equipped for their calling in society; it is structurally pliable and innovative; and it does not defend the privileges of a select group. However the church's missionary dimension evokes intentional, that is direct involvement in society; it actually moves beyond the walls of the church and engages in missionary "points of concentration" such as evangelism and work for justice and peace.³⁴

This new paradigm affords the church the opportunity to be both intentional and holistic. Jean Paul Heldt, in an article from 2004 titled, *Revisiting the Whole Gospel: Toward a Biblical Model of Holistic Mission in the 21st Century*, admits that there is still

³¹ Ibid., 372.

³² Ibid., 372.

³³ Leslie, Newbigin: *One Body, One Gospel, One World* (London and New York: International Missionary Council, 1958), 43.

³⁴ Bosch, 373.

an unresolved dichotomy between evangelism and social action, but the two are intricately interwoven and represents the whole gospel.³⁵ Bryant Myers supports this idea by claiming “Holistic mission is a frame for mission that refuses the dichotomy between material and spiritual, between evangelism and social action, between loving God and loving neighbor.”³⁶

Bosch strengthens the argument for this new ecumenical and holistic paradigm by suggesting the church’s involvement goes beyond just being a holding place for those who come; rather it must proclaim the gospel in ways that those who are oppressed can experience freedom from all injustices.³⁷ The world is the playing field and the Church has the arduous, yet very possible task of transforming it one person and one community at a time.

Bosch further suggests that the church must streamline its definition of salvation. The thought of salvation being anything but deliverance from sin is still a challenge for some mainstream denominations. Bosch says “the challenges of the modern world to the mission of the church in respect of the interpretation of salvation cannot be ignored.....new challenges call for new responses.”³⁸ The new paradigm has to offer more than just church membership, with all the rights and privileges that goes with it. It must also offer the salvation of God which is synonymous with God’s mission. In essence the new paradigm must be holistic.

³⁵ Jean Paul Heldt, *Revisiting the Whole Gospel: Toward a Biblical Model of Holistic Mission in the 21st Century*: *Missiology* 32- 2, 2004, 149-172.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Bosch, 378.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 399.

Bosch lends to this thought with the following assertion:

Never before in history has people's social distress been as extensive as it is in the twentieth century. But never before have Christians been in a better position than they are today to do something about this need. Poverty, misery, sickness, criminality and social chaos have assumed unheard of proportions...Marginalized groups in many countries of the world, including the United States, lack every form of active and even passive participation in society; inter human relationships are disintegrating; people are in the grip of a pattern of life from which they cannot possibly wrench themselves free.³⁹

Another proponent of this notion is Jurgen Moltman. In his publication, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, Moltman points out "identification with the poor" is a necessary element of the missionary church. Moltman's thesis is:

If we take the promises of Christ's presence seriously, we must talk about the brotherhood of believers and a brotherhood of the least of his brethren with Christ. "He who hears you hears me....He who visits them visits me". If the church appeals to the crucified and risen Christ, must it not represent this double brotherhood of Christ in itself and be present with work and Spirit, sacrament, fellowship and all creative powers among the poor, the hungry and the captives? Then the church with its mission would be present where Christ awaits it, amid the downtrodden, the sick and the captives. The apostolate says what the church is. The least of Christ's brethren say where the church belongs.⁴⁰

When mission is presented and understood in the above manner it is both holistic and transformative. Jean Paul Heldt posits that mission must meet the physical, economic spiritual and social needs if it is going to be relevant in the twenty first century.⁴¹ These four dimensions represent the totality of a person, thus mission to the oppressed offers freedom in all areas. Given the current economic landscape this will become increasingly important as the twenty first century progresses and more and more people are faced with the reality of not being able to purchase the basic necessities of life.

³⁹ Ibid., 399-400.

⁴⁰ Jurgen, Moltman: *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1977), 128-29.

⁴¹ Heldt, 158.

Rene Padilla notes that missionary paradigms must reflect the complexities of our time. Therefore the church must create models that have Jesus as the Lord of all life and show the interdependence of all humanity,⁴² The goal of any model must be transformation for the entire person; hence the need for a holistic paradigm that joins evangelism and social ministry. Mark Russell in the 2008 summer issue of the International Journal of Frontier Missiology, conveys evangelism and social ministry are functionally inseparable....they are both means to the end of increasing the effectiveness of the other.⁴³ Ministering to people holistically can provide a context for effective evangelism, because of the compassion and love it extends toward the less fortunate.

Russell further develops his theory by stating:

Recent discoveries in neuroscience have shown that development, diet, nutrition and other factors have an effect on a person's emotions and cognition. If a person is not fed well then their decision making abilities will not be as sharp. If they are not well rested their emotions will be more volatile.....in short a full stomach and good night's sleep puts somebody in a better position to hear and respond favorably to the gospel.⁴⁴

With more and more people joining the ranks of the homeless people in major cities throughout the United States, it is obvious that the church must give some serious thought as it pertains to mission in the twenty first century. Every church in every city, regardless of denomination, has the responsibility of extending God's mission to those who are poor and marginalized.

Bosch maintains the new paradigm will work when churches (local) realize that they are part of the Church (universal) for the sake of providing hope, through an

⁴² Jose Padilla: *Mission Integral* (Buenos Aires: Nueva Creacion, 1986), 135.

⁴³ Mark Russell: *Christian Mission Today: Are We on a Slippery Slope? Christian Mission is Holistic*: International Journal of Frontier Missiology, Vol. 25-2, 2008, 95.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 96.

ecumenical proclamation of the gospel.⁴⁵ He adds to this notion by suggesting that there has to be an intentional effort to reach those who are poor. Bosch calls this “God’s preferential option for the poor.”⁴⁶ The idea of God having an affinity with the poor of society is prevalent in both the Old and New Testaments. Bosch asserts God’s mission to the poor became an issue during the Geneva Conference of 1966, where the Assembly stated: We heard the cry of those who long for peace; of the hungry and exploited who demand bread and justice; of the victim of discrimination who claim human justice; and of the increasing millions who seek for the meaning of life (WCC 1968:5).⁴⁷

The new paradigm that Bosch proposes speaks to the totality of what mission needs to be in the twenty first century and beyond. This model includes an intentional, but not exclusive, focus on the poor, especially those who have fallen victim to the current economic oppression; that has caused many to lose their jobs, homes, families and subsequently their hope. Bosch concludes by quoting Ronald Sider who says “God is on the side of the oppressed. And if the privileged are really the people of God, they too, would be on the side of the poor; indeed, those who neglect the needy are not really God’s people.”⁴⁸ Hence the new model is ecumenical, holistic and transformative.

⁴⁵Bosch, 418.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 435.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 439.

CHAPTER THREE

Biblical Foundation

Isaiah 61:1-4

1 The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; 2 to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; 3 to provide for those who mourn in Zion- to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, to display his glory. 4 They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations.

The Old Testament foundation for this project is found in the Book of the prophet Isaiah. Blenkinsopp claims the book is unique in that it contains the same number of chapters, (66) as there are books in the Bible, making it the longest book¹. Isaiah consists of three major sections: First Isaiah (chapters 1-39), Second Isaiah (chapters 40-55), and Third Isaiah (chapters 56-66). J.J.M. Roberts asserts that the book is the "product of several prophets who ministered during different periods of Israel's history."² The book of Isaiah is referenced by several characters in the New Testament, including Jesus. Jerome one of the church fathers and translators declares Isaiah should be called an

¹ Blenkinsopp, Joseph, *Isaiah 56-66: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (NY: Doubleday, 2003), 35.

² Roberts, J.J.M. *The Harper Collins Study Bible* (San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins Publishing, 2006), 912.

evangelist rather than a prophet and the book should be considered the fifth gospel because he describes all the mysteries of Christ and the Church.³

Third Isaiah was written during the post-exilic reign of King Cyrus in approximately, 538 B.C.E. In Isaiah 61, the setting is no longer Babylon, but Palestine and the emphasis is on restoration. Not much is known about the writer, perhaps he is a contemporary of Second Isaiah thus the message of salvation spoken of in previous chapters is prominent throughout the third book as well. The audience is the Jewish people who had been exiled in Babylon. They were God's chosen, the seed of God's promise to Abraham, yet they experienced the pitfalls of life as everyone else. Those that survived expected a glorious restoration as envisioned by Second Isaiah but was soon frustrated by innumerable hardships.

Third Isaiah contains several genres, including oracles, exhortation, heralds and prophecy. However, Blenkinsopp argues "Third Isaiah does not constitute what most would recognize as a literary work rather it is the result of redactional and not authorial activity. It is in his words extreme writing."⁴ The opening verses, (1-4) have many features that remind the reader of the servant poems, especially chapter 42. This according to Blenkinsopp was done intentionally to establish some kind of continuity between third Isaiah and the previous chapters. But more important it expanded the thought of God's presence in the affairs of God's people.⁵ R.K. Harrison joins the conversation by comparing Third Isaiah with the book of Micah and asserting "the final

³ Sawyer, F.A., *The Fifth Gospel: Isaiah in the History of Christianity* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 166.

⁴ Blenkinsopp, 37.

⁵ Ibid.

ten chapters, particularly chapter 61, deal with the ethical prerequisites necessary for the redemption of Israel,”⁶ thus highlighting God’s intervention in the affairs of humanity.

According to J.R. Rosenbloom it includes several themes concerning the operation of the restored Temple, with special attention given to the Sabbath, cult, coming of the Lord, justice, righteousness, comfort and the import of the servant/servants in the mission of God.⁷ This text along with chapters 60 and 62 forms the nucleus of the prophet’s message, which is the full restoration for the people and the rebuilding of the ruined community. The book is celebrated and appreciated mostly by liberation and feminist theologians, who contend Isaiah’s writing is a mandate for peace and justice.⁸ Hence, it offers the hearers an amiable ending to what appears to be a worst case scenario. This message of hope is one that permeates throughout Third Isaiah. The devastation of the past is over and although the ruin is still visible there is genuine hope of a glorious future.

The prophet begins his oracle, with the announcement that he has been anointed by the Lord’s Spirit to speak on God’s behalf to the people of God. The language used in vss. 1-2, particularly, the word proclaim suggest that the message is one of victory. A.S. Herbert maintains “the message is so startling that the messenger must be empowered by God (Spirit) and authorized by him (sent) to deliver it. To bring good news includes not

⁶ Harrison, R.K. *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Erdmans Publishing Co, 1969), 779.

⁷ The Dead Sea Scrolls, The Book of Isaiah. <http://mb-soft.com/believe/txs/Isaiah.htm> (accessed March 15, 2011).

⁸ Clements, Ronald E. *Deutero-Isaianic Development of First Isaiah’s Themes: Journal for the study of the Old Testament* 31. 1985, 103.

only the message but action (bind up) and proclamation.”⁹ Because the message was to be one of good news, a message that focused on the future rather than the present, a special anointing was required. One of the Hebrew words for anoint is *masah*, described by Vines as being set apart for an office or function.¹⁰

The act of anointing was common in antiquity to kings and priests, thus Isaiah joins Ezekiel, as being the only two anointed Judean prophets. Dennis Bratcher explains it further by suggesting the anointing is not a one time action rather it is the continuous presence of God in every function. God’s presence is represented by God’s spirit, who enables humanity to do the job that God has called them too.¹¹ Blenkinsopp maintains that it is the possession of the Spirit and the sending or commissioning that defines the prophetic anointing.¹² Blenkinsopp further suggest that the prophet, like everyone else was affected by the devastation of his home, thus he needed a special anointing to encourage the masses to look beyond the past.

The prophet was anointed to speak to five groups of people, from the same nation. The groups were the poor, the brokenhearted, the captives, prisoners, and mourners. The poor in this instance did not necessarily mean those who were without food, clothes and shelter, it also included those who were poor in spirit, emotions and health; those who were powerless. The poor and oppressed were considered worthless.

⁹ Herbert, A. S. *The Cambridge Bible Commentary: The book of the prophet Isaiah 40-66* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 160.

¹⁰ Unger, Merrill F., White, William Jr. *Vines Complete Expository Dictionary OF Old And New Testament Words* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1996), 5.

¹¹ Biblical and Theological Resources For Growing Christians, Renewed Mission Verse Commentary on Isaiah 61. <http://www.cresourcei.org/isa61.html>. (accessed September 7, 2011).

¹² Blenkinsopp, 221.

They were family members, parishioners, Israelites and pagans. The poor were also people, who were working, but were still unable to live comfortably, because of oppression.

The brokenhearted were those who were faithful in their service to God, but are now faint hearted because of personal issues such as exile and poverty. Perhaps, they struggled through a bad economy, which led to other calamities. This brokenhearted community was waiting for God to deliver, but while waiting they grew weary. They were powerless. Similarly, the captives had to deal with the fact that they lost everything while in captivity. The captives, Westermann claims “does not mean just those in exile, but people who are in debt and those who are suffering.”¹³ It was those who had lost everything and now had to work as indentured slaves. The economy was volatile at best and the stress of trying to maintain their homes and other possessions added to their demise. The probability of regaining valuable possessions is at best dim, even for those who could afford to pay.

Likewise the prisoners were not necessarily those who were incarcerated, although they too were included, rather it was those who were imprisoned by their thoughts. Cognitively, they could not see pass their current situation. This is evident by the fact the exile is over; King Cyrus allowed them to return home, but the people were still living as though they were in Babylon. This point is further highlighted in verse 3 where the people are still mourning over the devastation. The prophet conveys that they were more occupied with the result of the enemy’s attack than they were with the message.

¹³ Claus, Westermann. *Isaiah 40-66 A Commentary* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1969), 296.

Nevertheless, the prophet continues his message of restoration. He makes it clear the good news that he had been anointed to preach was that God's going to restore this battered and beaten nation. This restoration or better yet transformation was a collaborative effort between God, the prophet and the people. And the result would be holistic. It was God's Spirit resting on the prophet that compelled him to deliver the message. Yet God expects him to collaborate with both the faith and secular communities. This collaboration is so vital to God's mission that Herbert claims "Zion, which is synonymous with Israel, the worshipping community of God, should share the burden of ministering to those who are afflicted and imprisoned."¹⁴ Hence the faith community must be an active participant in the mission of God.

But before the people could participate their attitudes had to be changed. The prophet/ pastor, was prepared but the people were still trying to ascertain their next step. To prepare them God had to change their identity. So God instructs the prophet to proclaim to them that not only was God going to wipe the mourning ashes from their heads, give them a new set of clothes and change their names. God was also going to plant or send them to the areas where they were needed. And more importantly God gave them oil to replace the ashes. The oil symbolized that they too were anointed for service. Those who were anointed were considered righteous. This anointing was important because it illumined God at work on behalf of the underprivileged.

The notion of God intervening in the lives of the poor and oppressed is a constant thought for Third Isaiah. James Mays supports this notion by asserting "Third Isaiah gives a consistent depiction of a distinction between the wicked and the righteous in the

¹⁴ Ibid., 166.

community.”¹⁵ Those who reject God’s message are counted among the wicked, but those who accept are picked out by God to collaborate in God’s mission. It is the Faith community responsibility to too carry out the mandate of God that has been proclaimed by the prophet. The response of the people so pleased God, that the prophet in Isa. 61:3 calls them oaks of righteousness.

This new title suggests that the people are no longer suffering, rather they are standing tall. Dennis Bratcher conveys that oaks (terebinth) were a symbol of strength and stability, trees that are well planted; whose root is in Christ.¹⁶ Raymond Brown strengthens this view by adding the imagery of oaks are more powerful when we take into consideration that Palestine was semi desert and that large trees were a rarity.¹⁷ Although the city is still in ruins, the prophet because of the anointing proclaims hope.

Finally, the poor, brokenhearted, captive and prisoner can stop mourning. The prophet’ message awakens their minds, bodies and spirits. Again it is a holistic transformation that takes place. He showed them the blueprint for their restoration and to their amazement they are included in the restoration process. This collaborative project will not happen unless the community is willing to assist the prophet with the rebuilding of their city. The function of this and any faith community is to offer hope to those who are without hope through both word and deed. It is the servant/ community who joins the less fortunate in their quest for freedom, by speaking on their behalf and giving of

¹⁵ Mays, James L. *Harper Collins Bible Commentary: Isaiah* (New York: Harper San Francisco, 2000), 532.

¹⁶ <http://www.cresourcei.Org/isa61.html> (accessed March 15, 2011) 3.

¹⁷ Brown, Raymond, *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1988), 329.

themselves to make sure that those without can at least have an opportunity to enjoy the same liberties as their neighbors.

John Oswalt speaks about the character of the people and maintains “that it is God’s character that is being experienced through the arms of the people”¹⁸. The author of Third Isaiah acknowledged, very vividly, that there must be collaboration for the mission to be successful. Yes, the Spirit of the LORD was upon him and he was anointed to proclaim an empowered message, but the project could not be completed without the help of those who were affected by the devastation. That is the same point Jesus makes in Luke 4.

Isaiah 61:1-4 is also vital because it shows how God works through people to accomplish God’s mission. The word/ vision were given to the prophet/ pastor, who then proclaimed it to and convinced the people that God was concerned about their situation. Once they were informed of God’s plan, they were empowered to collaborate with God and the prophet in the restoration of their city. Thus the use of scripture was and must continue to be utilized in order for transformation to take place. Hence, Isaiah 61:1-4 gives a perfect example of what can happen when people attitudes are transformed and mission is holistic.

Matthew 25:34-40

34Then the king will say to those at his right hand, Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; 35For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger, and you welcomed me, 36 I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me. 37 Then the righteous will answer him, Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? 38 And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and

¹⁸ Oswalt, John, *The Book Of Isaiah Chapters 40-66* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1998), 562.

gave you clothing? 39 And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you? 40 And the king will answer them, truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.

This pericope from Matthew complements the Isaiah text by demonstrating what a faith community should and can do when they are committed to the mission of God. The important of the text for this project is the suggestive collaboration that Jesus expects of his followers, namely the Sheep. The book of Matthew, which was written after Mark's account, speaks to a community that had been greatly influenced by Jewish traditions and culture. It is in Matthew that the Christian community is called the church (16:18; 18:17). The church is important to Matthew, mainly as a conduit to spread the message of Jesus. Leander Keck claims Matthew use of the Q source was slightly different from Luke and Mark in that Matthew's written sources are mostly drawn from oral traditions.¹⁹ This mode of communication, although common in the first century, is also the reason for the uncertainty surrounding the year that the gospel was recorded.

Keck claims that Mark was written a few years either side of A.D. 70, so Matthew must be enough later to become the sacred tradition of the community. Matthew he adds seems to be intensely concerned with the developments in formative Judaism in the generation after 70.²⁰

Similar to the uncertainty of the date of the gospel, is its origin. While, some have suggested Egypt, Syria, and Galilee as possible cities, Dennis Duling provides insight on the subject by asserting that Antioch of Syria is the place of composition, because of its l

¹⁹ Leander Keck. *The New Interpreter's Bible: A Commentary In Twelve Volumes* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996). 105

²⁰ Ibid., 105.

eternity may be like.²⁵ Hence, Mathew can be considered to be an instructional manual that highlights the people/ disciples; those who are called by Jesus, working diligently to fulfill the mission of God.

This passage which is a judgmental scene depicts Jesus as the future King and Judge who will judge all the nations based on how they have treated the less fortunate of society. The appointed time for this judgment is not revealed, but it is clear that the king will judge all people, including the church, based on their treatment of the poor and oppressed. Matthew's use of the title king is ironic in that it was King Herod who proved to be Jesus' greatest nemesis. Jesus as king also caused great strife among Jews, because they considered God, and only God, to be king. The king is seated on his throne and he has summoned all of humanity, both Jews and Gentiles, for their hearings and sentencing's. Those who are judged favorably are allowed to sit on the right side, the place of blessing, prepared for the righteous, while those who are judged unfavorably are condemned to a place prepared for the devil and his angels (v.41).

The focus for this project begins in verse 34 where the King invites those on his right to come. The word, come suggest that they are being called to view something better. It is also common to Matthew's writing as it pertains to the sayings of Jesus. For instance in Matt.11:28 Jesus invites all that have labored and are burdened to come unto him for rest. After Jesus calls those on his right to come, he tells them that they are the beneficiaries of an unearned inheritance. The blessing is one that has been reserved in eternity for those who would answer the call to serve others, while on earth.

²⁵ Eric R. Severson, *The Least Of These: Selected Readings In Christian History* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2007), 15.

This inheritance, according to Beare is a transfer to the spiritual from the notion of the land that God promised to Israel as an inheritance, to be passed from generation to generation.²⁶

Although this pericope speaks eschatologically, those who are judged favorably are invited to the reading of the will, where they are rewarded for their works while on earth. This group unknowingly performed great acts of kindness toward those in need, without worrying about earthly accolades. The thrust of the scene is the response of those on trial toward the oppressed and poor. Keck interjects this scene is the fundamental base of the text, and that people's response or lack of response, is in fact the same response they give to Christ.²⁷ The King uses basic human needs, such as food, medical attention and clothes, combined with the spiritual qualities of forgiveness, compassion and reconciliation as the scale that determines whether a person is considered a sheep or a goat.

The criterion for the reward is recorded in verses 35-36, where we are privy to view the basis by which the king makes his decision. The king begins his dialogue by naming the groups which makes up "the least of these." The list includes those who were hungry, thirsty, sojourning, naked, sick and imprisoned. These are conditions that are common to most cultures, even those who confess a belief in Christ. Therefore the church has no excuse, when asked what you have done for the least of these.

Those who are righteous are rewarded because they demonstrated acts of passion and mercy to those in need, without regard to ethnicity, race or reason. The fact of the matter is that their response is based solely on the needs of the least of these and not some

²⁶ Beare, 494.

²⁷ Keck, 456.

rigid religious law with multiple stipulations. Subsequently their efforts are extended to all who are in need. Keck strengthens this point by asserting the needy brother or sister is not restricted to Christians and missionaries, who very well may be in need, rather it is any person whose need calls for a response.²⁸ It is worth noting that the response of the king is holistic, because it takes care of the basic human needs as well as the spiritual.

Matthew further stresses how important it is for mission to be holistic by highlighting how the righteous had visited both those who were suffering from some type of physical malady and those who were incarcerated. The righteous demonstrates acts of mercies, which demands proper medical attention for some and justice for others. Their visitation assures that those who are sick and imprisoned are being treated in a humane manner. The righteous performs these acts without asking what's in it for me. Rather, their acts are based on their relationship to God, which according to Gustavo Gutierrez is one of fellowship and human hood. It is claims Gutierrez our encounters with fellow humans, especially the poor, destitute and exploited, we find the Lord; therefore, an act of love to these the least is a gesture of God.²⁹

Noteworthy, is the fact that the righteous in this pericope not only performed acts of mercies, but they performed them unconsciously, as it pertained to the king. The text does not provide us with any other motivational criteria besides their love for God and humanity. Hence, they did what they could to aid those in need, without any knowledge of being rewarded. This was obvious by their confusion regarding the king's commendation.

²⁸ Ibid., 456.

²⁹ Gustavo, Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (London, EG: SCM Press, 1985), 109.

They are astonished by his remarks, but instead of sticking their chests out in pride. The righteous responded by asking the question, when did we do those things?

To their amazement the king replies to their inquiry by reminding them of their deeds toward the “least of them.” Although this group was often neglected and ostracized, they were dear to the King. As a matter of fact they were so dear to him that he called them family. It appears that the king, who could have selected any group to shower with his kindness, decides to align himself with the misaligned of society; the persons in the community who are experiencing some type of hardship, due to oppression and injustices. This motif is important for Matthew because he too is a part of this community. Thus, Matthew depicts the righteous as being an active and willing partner in God’s mission.

This blessed group is not content with just going to the temple, rather they understand that mission is also worship. Hence, their worship is for real and not just an occasional act of kindness done once a year. Daniel Palte says “the blessed or righteous servant actions must not be relegated to the church, but they should be aimed at relieving hunger, thirst, isolation, nakedness and the despair of sickness and imprisonment throughout the community.”³⁰ Those who embrace this notion are the ones who get to sit next to the king in his kingdom.

While those who are content with just showing up on the Sabbath with no regard for the poor, oppressed and marginalized are placed on the left side with the goats. This group will be just as surprised as the sheep when the king summons them before his throne to play back the video of their life stories. Their failure to do the right thing as it pertains to mission, secures their place in an eternal fire pit. This text illumines the fact

³⁰Palte, Daniel, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1987), 349.

that the king will return one day to judge both the righteous and the wicked, therefore those who are slack as it pertains to mission toward the "least of these" within the community should pay close attention to this text.

In reflection, this text provides the New Testament framework needed for this project, because it speaks to the current condition of the church. The righteous people in the text are the perfect prototypes because they willingly and diligently perform their deeds. In addition this first century faith community answers all the questions in regards to the identity of the "least of these." Matthew does not reveal the ethnicity of the righteous, perhaps they were Jews, but they very well could have been a mixed group, consisting of both Jews and gentiles. But he does show how the transformed disciples were an integral part of God's mission. Their actions re-enforces the import of a missional church; one whose ministers holistically.

In contrast, the goats or those who are called wicked because of their failure or refusal to show compassion, symbolizes what is wrong with the church. Matthew uses the judgment scene as the backdrop to illustrate how important it is for those who are called righteous, to avoid the temptation of neglecting the poor and oppressed, lest they face the judgment of the king. The mere fact that the king aligns himself with this group should motivate the church to do all they can to assist in the general well being of those who are hungry, thirsty, sojourning, naked, sick and imprisoned. By doing so the church not only secures her seat on the right side of the king, she also receives her inheritance.

Theological Foundation

The study of theology is always accompanied by questions that challenge and compel the believer to dig deep for an answer, and what begin as questions become theories, which seek to provide answers as it pertains to God's relationship to humanity. These inquiries and theories are sometimes controversial in nature, thus forcing adherents to search beyond what one learns by being an occasional visitor to Sunday school. Thomas and Wondra describe theology as inquiries about God, or about the world or part of it, in relation to God.³¹

However in most faith communities these questions are left to those leaders who are as perplexed as the inquirers when it comes to defining theology. They have faith in and worship a God that is in some respects foreign. Consequently they ask questions that are instrumental in their spiritual development, yet sometimes unanswered in their community.

Theology is what Daniel Migliore calls "faith seeking understanding" that prompts questions, sets an inquiry in motion and forces the believer to fight the inclination to accept things as they are.³² However, for many Christians, things remain the same as they struggle in their efforts to gain an understanding regarding God and God's mission, within their own context. Thus each faith community develops its own theology based on its understanding of God. Owens and Wondra maintain that theology

³¹Owens C. Thomas and Ellen K. Wondra, *Introduction To Theology* (New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2002), 19.

³² Daniel Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI, 1995), 2.

is reflection on Christian life and struggles for freedom or liberation, for the full humanity of all persons, and for the transformation of humans and society.³³

Karl Barth lends to the conversation by suggesting that theology must be firmly rooted in the church but flexible enough to ask questions that goes beyond the scope of church dogma. He adds flesh to this theory when he states that one broods alternately over the newspaper and the New Testament and actually sees fearfully little of the organic connection between the two worlds concerning which one should now be able to give a clear and powerful witness.³⁴ For Barth, theology included the Bible and the current events that affect the community. The plight of the people to whom he preached was just as relevant as the text from which he preached. The two were inseparable.

Grenz supports this notion by maintaining that the study of theology should begin with a working definition. For Grenz, theology is humanity's attempt at trying to understand God's being, nature and relationship to the world³⁵. It seeks to answer questions while at the same time asking more questions. Hence, liberation theology attempts to provide answers to those who are oppressed. Leonardo Boff states theology must not fix its mind mainly on formulas...but its focus must be on the mystery of God.³⁶ Boff a liberation theologian agrees with Grenz in that God's mystery is revealed through humanity's faith in a Christ who liberates those who are oppressed. Liberation theology adherents are able to offer help to those who are hurting, because they too are familiar with the plight of the poor and oppressed

³³Thomas and Wondra, 1.

³⁴ Karl, Barth, *Revolutionary Theology in the Making*, trans. James D. Smart (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1964), 45.

³⁵ Grenz, 38.

³⁶ Leonardo Boff, *Faith on the Edge* (Grand Rapids, MI: Harper & Row Publishers, 1989), 45.

That being said the theological solution for this paper will be addressed through the lens of liberation theology, a form of systematic theology that allows the reader to juxtapose theology against and through their own culture. Daniel Migliore asserts systematic theology involves the continuous re-interpretation of the doctrine and practices of the church in light of what the church vows to be of central importance-namely, the gospel of Jesus Christ which liberates and renews life.³⁷ This new life is obtainable only when Christians are committed to the task of being the church.

This collaborative task, according to Migliore, requires that Christians participate by asking the following questions: (1) Does proclamation and practice of the church reveal God in Jesus? (2) Is there adequate expression of the whole truth? (3) Does proclamation and practice represent the God of Jesus Christ as a living reality in the present context? (4) Does the proclamation lead to transformation in personal and social life?³⁸

This new and exciting Christian theological thought, which focuses on Gods' affinity for the oppressed and the liberating power of Jesus and the Holy Spirit, was formulated in an era, namely the late 1950's and 1960's, when people of color were fighting for equality. The birth of liberation theology has been attributed to James Cone a black liberation theologian. Cone believed like Tillich, Barth, Bonhoeffer and Martin Luther King that theology, as a function of the Christian Church, must serve the needs of the church. He claims as Tillich that as a system theology must satisfy the truth of the Christian message and the interpretation of the message for each generation.³⁹

This breakthrough approach allowed theologians like Cone to interpret the bible from a familiar vantage point; his own community. This new method, according to

³⁷ Ibid., 10.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* Vol. 1 (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 3.

Thomas and Wondra is vital because it takes mainline theology and develops what is already present; thus nurturing hope, transformative practices and understanding for the community.⁴⁰

Cone's first attempt at explaining his theory was met with criticism by both white and black scholars within the mainline church, because they believed that Cone's theology mirrored the concept found in Black Power; which they concluded taught hatred of whites. Cone defended his theology by stating the task of Black (liberation) theology is to analyze the black man's condition in the light of God's revelation in Jesus Christ.⁴¹ Cone's christocentric perspective is paramount for this project and any serious study of theology because it lifts up true liberation, which is found only through faith in Jesus the Christ.

Consequently, for Cone, Christian theology is theology that promotes liberation of all those who are oppressed. Cone states that a rational study of the being of God in the world in light of the existential situation of an oppressed community.⁴² Hence, black liberation theology is God's intervention in the affairs of the colored people from the southern states and the sophisticated African Americans who are privy to matriculate at some of the finest institutions and author some of the most profound writings known to humanity, even while being oppressed. The fact that God exhibits God's love for oppressed people throughout the bible supports Cone's theory of blacks being the object of God's liberation.

⁴⁰ Thomas and Wondra, 7.

⁴¹ James Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power* (New York, NY: The Seabury Press, 1969), 116.

⁴² James, Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Philadelphia, PA: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1970), 17.

Cone's notion of liberation is not restricted to a mere spiritual experience rather it is one that encompasses the totality of the human. Liberation theology for Cone is the vehicle that traverses the terrains of poverty, sickness, nakedness, hunger and any other peril that oppresses. It is freedom from all bondage- physical, emotional, spiritual, financial and racial. It is a holistic experience that begins and ends with God at work in humanity through Christ. Cone claims that it is the form of black religious thought expressed in the style of story and its content is liberation. Black Theology then, is the story of black people's struggle for liberation under extreme oppression.⁴³

Thus liberation theology is also dialectical because the storyteller is both the conduit and participant of the story. Subsequently the storyteller is revered as one who is sent from God to merge the history of God's people in the Bible with that of the oppressed community. The joining of the text with the current condition of the community provides hope by emphasizing that liberation is always the end product. Dwight Hopkins, a colleague of Cone describes liberation as the interplay between the pain of oppression and the promise of liberation found in the Bible and a similar existence still being experienced by African Americans and poor people in today's world.⁴⁴

Therefore liberation theology offers hope to marginalized people of every ethnicity. Liberation theology of any kind promotes justice by making sure that the church, whose task is to form a relationship with those who are hurting, is a part of the solution and not the problem. This relationship or solidarity with the poor forms the

⁴³ James, Cone H, *God of the Oppressed* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010), 49.

⁴⁴ Dwight Hopkins, *Heart and Head: Black Theology, Past, Present and Future* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 7.

praxis for theology because it supports and aids the poor in their quest for justice. For this reason Gustavo Gutierrez, a liberation theologian from South America states theology as critical reflection on historical praxis is a liberating theology, a theology of the liberating transformation of the history of humankind.⁴⁵ Juan Segundo, a contemporary of Gustavo Gutierrez asserts that liberation theology is vital because it is inclusive of all humanity, as long as they exhibit faith in God. It is Segundo argues their faith that liberates humanity from the vices of injustice, thus freeing them to have a relationship with God. Gutierrez who concurs with Segundo states that liberation theology is not categorized as believers or unbelievers but as oppressors or oppressed.⁴⁶

The problem with many contemporary theologies is that they tend to suggest that prosperity and wealth are more important than biblical liberation. As a result many churches and communities are asleep as it relates to the oppressed. This lack of concern or indifference to the poor by the White Church was the catalyst that compelled Cone, King and others to stand in solidarity with the oppressed. This solidarity which is evident throughout the Bible is extremely important for God's mission in the twenty first century church.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes that this solidarity is beneficial to the church only after we have for once learnt to see from the perspective of the outcast, the suspects, the maltreated, the powerless, the oppressed, the reviled-from the perspective of those who suffer.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973), 12.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 23.

⁴⁷ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (New York: Macmillan, 1971), 17.

Since God's mission toward the poor and oppressed has not changed, the church must commit some of her time, energy and money toward the insignificant people in her community.

Liberation theology is the theological foundation for this project because it offers God's intervention and concern for those who are marginalized. By doing so it offers the church with the weaponry needed to fight against the inequalities that many poor and underprivileged people face daily. Many are suffering because of the church's failure to offer hope in their situation. This perspective has caused many to regard church as nothing more than a social club. If Bonhoeffer is correct the church should not only be a place for those who are whole, it should also resemble a hospital, clinic, pantry, after school program and any other agency that is ministering to the least of society. He concurs with other liberation theologians who understand that Christian theology and ultimately liberation theology is God's intervention in the plight of humanity, especially those who are oppressed.

Although many of the churches profess be Missionary Baptist, there is very little mission. The fact that they are comfortable with their lack of effort, or worse their indifference, suggests that the church does not understand the entirety of God's mission. Nor does she understand the theology behind mission. This ignorance as it pertains to theology has caused many Christians to disregard the importance of being in mission with God. Stanley Grenz further suggests that the lack of understanding has caused some Christians to become hostile.⁴⁸ Perhaps this is the reason many look upon the oppressed with great disdain.

⁴⁸ Stanley Grenz and Roger E. Olson, *Who Needs Theology: An Introduction to the Study of God* (Chicago, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1996), 1.

Even though theology is as old as humanity, many Christians are confused when it comes to defining their own theology. This may be attributed to the fact that in recent years many pastors and other religious leaders stopped pursuing God and started chasing prosperity. The theology of prosperity offered cars, homes and money in the bank, but it did not offer liberty from the oppression of debt. And in some instances it led to more oppression. With that in mind theology, namely liberation theology must become an integral part of the church's education ministry.

Liberation theology is important to mission because it signifies God's concern for both the oppressed and the oppressor. When the faith community shares the message of liberty the oppressed is given hope and the oppressor, by releasing them, is given the opportunity to share in the revitalization of the community. The acts of release and forgiveness are integral elements of liberation theology. Andrew Sung Park borrowing from Sharon Ringe asserts that by sharing the message of Jesus Christ and his ethics is in fact being involved in liberation.⁴⁹ This point of view is critical because those within the church sometimes need to be reminded of God's grace and love toward all of humanity.

Liberation theology answers the call by providing a holistic alternative to other theologies. David Bosch injects liberation theology is effective because it has helped the church rediscover its ancient faith in the God of Israel: "Whose qualification was founded on his involvement in history as the God of righteousness, and justice who championed the cause of the weak and oppressed."⁵⁰ Thus theology as it pertains to mission must not

⁴⁹ Andrew Sung Park, *From Hurt to Healing: A Theology of the Wounded* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2004), 157.

⁵⁰ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1991), 442.

restrict itself solely to the spiritual being rather it must address the whole being.

Moreover, Bosch sheds light on liberation theology's ability to change conditions and people through the Holy Spirit and faith. He suggests that this transformation is only possible when Christians are forced to allow theology and mission to be submerged in their social ethics.⁵¹

The interrelatedness of these three disciplines is what makes liberation theology a valuable tool for this project. For the oppressed and marginalized, freedom is dependent upon the people of God whose faith compels them to collaborate with God in doing mission. Gutierrez agrees since faith and life are inseparable liberation is affected at three different levels: from social situations of oppression and marginalization, from every kind of personal servitude and from sin.⁵² For Gutierrez, Segundo and other Latin theologians, the question that needs to be answered is what is the correlation between theology and the history of salvation?

Many Christians define salvation as being free from sin. Those with this perspective contend that Christ's reason for coming was to free humanity from the traditional sins, such as those contained in the Ten Commandments. In some aspects this antiquated view of theology is responsible for the lack of mission efforts in the Christian community. Gutierrez insists we must attempt to discern the interrelationship among the different meanings of the term liberation and the historical process of salvation. Gutierrez further states that the task of liberation theology is to elucidate the current state of these problems which continue to plague society.⁵³

⁵¹ Bosch, 398.

⁵² Gutierrez, 90.

It is at this point that liberation theologians argue that the traditional interpretation of Christian faith and salvation must be deideologized and given an interpretation that draws out the social and political implications of the gospel.⁵⁴

With that in mind Cone's Black theology is just as Christian as other theologies. If it is true that Christian theology is about liberating the whole human, then Cone is correct when he declares that Black (liberation) theology is not only Christian theology, it is possibly the only expression of Christian theology in America.⁵⁵ Andrew Sung Park, a professor at United Seminary in Dayton, Ohio, concurs with Cone's theory when he claims liberation means to be free from religious, economic, social, political and cultural domination, injustice and violence.⁵⁶ Sung Park an Asian theologian maintains liberation is complex because it occurs at several levels.

Park states the three levels are individual which deals with the deliverance from personal abuse, domination, bondage and exploitation; the next level is collective, which is liberation from the oppressive communal customs and traditions that dominate social relations. And thirdly the structural level is the liberation from slavish system, legitimate racism, systemic patriarchy and undemocratic hierarchy.⁵⁷

The church is called and sent by God to make a difference in the world therefore it must awake from its extended sleep and use the power that it has to offer hope to those who are in bondage.

⁵³ Ibid., 31.

⁵⁴ Thomas and Wondra, 194.

⁵⁵ Cone, 23.

⁵⁶ Andrew Sung Park, *Triune Atonement: Christ's Healing For Sinners, Victims, And The Whole Creation* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 71.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 71.

Cone strengthens this argument by stating the church is that community that participates in Christ's liberating work in history, therefore it can never endorse "law and order" while people are suffering. Since it has received the gospel and has accepted what that means for human existence, the church must be a revolutionary community, breaking laws that destroy persons.⁵⁸

This perspective was also a common theme for Martin Luther King, who believed the task of theology is to serve the church and offer liberation to the oppressed. King maintained it is the church's job to fight against the status quo, as it pertains to laws and church dogma that allowed oppression. King in a Conian way exposes the church (white) as being an accessory in the oppression of people who were imprisoned because of their race and social status. King who like Tillich, Bonhoeffer, Barth, Cone and most other theologians attempts to illustrate the relationship of theology to culture, scripture, history and tradition. The most noticeable difference between King and Cone lies in Cone's insistence that Black theology, although it speaks against the oppressive white view, is for blacks. Whereas King would suggest that theology should be void of all oppression including language.

In his book *King Among The Theologians*, Noel Erskine surmises King would have chafed at the term, Black theology, but there are striking similarities between their approaches. Erskine compares Cone and King by stating the following:

Both theologians seek to relate the gospel of Jesus to the existential situation; and they assert a Christological focus in their attempts to relate the gospel to situations in which people hurt and are humiliated. Further there is a theological commitment from both to translate the gospel of Jesus as commitment not only for personal but also social change.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Cone, 231.

⁵⁹ Noel Leo Erskine, *King Among The Theologians* (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 1994), 135-36.

These approaches are important for this project because it supports the thesis that people attitudes toward mission can be transformed when they have an understanding of theology. Liberation theology serves the church and community well because it is Christ centered. Thomas and Wondra insist that theology without Christ is not theology. Jon Sobrino validates this notion by suggesting liberation Christology is important because it illumines the historical Jesus' relationship with the oppressed and his rebuke of the oppressors. Sobrino further states, the purpose of Christology is to put forward the truth of Christ from the standpoint of liberation.⁶⁰

God's desire to have a relationship with humanity is evident throughout the Old Testament. But it is God's revelation of God's mission through Jesus that highlights God's love for all of humanity in general, but more so for those who are oppressed. Cone and others agree that theology has to be contextual for it to be effective, but it is Cone who expands this theory by stressing the need for an interpretation of Scripture, that reveals the true Jesus. Cone offers that Jesus, The Black Messiah, who was a Jew, identified with his people in their oppression and especially with the outcast in order to liberate them.⁶¹

Cone maintains that for Christian theology to be relevant it must be grounded in the biblical story of God's liberation toward the oppressed. Cone claims that any theology that ignores God in Christ as the liberator of the oppressed or that makes salvation as liberation secondary is ipso facto, invalid and thus heretical.⁶² Black (liberation) theology provides the oppressed with a biblical story and person who is much like them.

⁶⁰ Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, (New York: Orbis Books, 2007), 6.

⁶¹ Cone, 102.

⁶² Cone, 75.

Liberation theology allows the oppressed to interpret the biblical story through their culture and experience. "Cone insists the task of black liberation theology is to analyze the gospel of Jesus Christ in light of oppressed blacks so they will see the gospel as inseparable from their condition and as bestowing on them the necessary power to break the chains of oppression."⁶³

Another important aspect of liberation theology is tradition. Liberation theology does not force the oppressed to destroy their traditions as is the practice of some, rather it embraces tradition. Cone inserts tradition is important because it bridges the Scripture with our contemporary situation. Tradition Cone says represents the Church's affirmation of faith in Jesus Christ at different periods of history.⁶⁴ These sources are the components which make black (liberation) theology just as important as any other Christian theology. They are also the norm through which the black church develops her theology, liturgy and missional purpose. Cone elaborates further by stating black theology seeks to create a theological norm which is in harmony with the black condition and the biblical revelation.⁶⁵

Thomas and Wondra contend Cone's liberal view of revelation has amounted to a revolution in Christian thought, in both scholarly circles and the church.⁶⁶ This new revelation not only helps to influence the liturgy and leadership of the local congregation, it also forces her to rely upon the Holy Spirit for direction, which is essential for the church to have a credible witness in the world.

⁶³ Ibid., 102.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 104.

⁶⁵ Cone, *Black Liberation Theology*, 76.

⁶⁶ Thomas, 29.

Interestingly, God's mission seems to prefer those who have been hurt and misaligned, rather than those who are materially rich.

Gutierrez builds upon this theory by claiming true theology, which for him is liberation, translates into a lifestyle of service that compels us (church), to take a stand with the victims in our communities.⁶⁷ The church by standing in solidarity with the oppressed not only helps in their liberation, she also enables and nurtures them. Thus the oppressed are then able to help in the rebuilding of the community.

Dwight Hopkins claims Yahweh of the Old Testament, chooses not to favor the rich and the ruling classes; instead, Yahweh makes a deliberate and calculated move to hear the cries of slaves. And as we collaborate with God in the struggle to realize the preferential option for the poor we will begin to bring about the new self and the commonwealth.⁶⁸

This ideology is present in the second stanza of the Covenant, which most Baptist churches have adopted and maintain that the church (people) should always strive to support the ministry, so it will thrive and be in position to support the poor. Thus any theology for mission must be rooted in God's mission which is revealed in the incarnated Christ. David Goatley, supports this notion by asserting Christian missions grow out of the incarnation of Jesus whose life was largely spent among common people and suffering people."⁶⁹ Liberation theology not only depicts Christ as our personal savior, it also shows him as one who is familiar with suffering, grief, pain, hunger and poverty. The Church by employing the sources of liberation theology offers to the oppressed an opportunity at freedom.

⁶⁷ Hopkins, 66.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 69

⁶⁹David E. Goatley, *A Divine Assignment: The Missiology of Wendell Clay Sommerville* (Missouri: Lucas Parks Books, 2010), 46.

Hence the oppressed will begin to see Christ as savior and liberator. The one our ancestor's theology, called food in a starving land, a friend to the friendless and a bridge over troubled water. Those oppressed in the community can be transformed when the church collaborates with God by offering Christ. Not just the divine Christ, but the human Christ who suffered and died, and still lives. Liberation theology offers the oppressed the best chance for deliverance because it reveals God's plan for liberation within the context of the oppressed and not the status quo. Subsequently the oppressed after being liberated becomes a valuable asset to the community. Cone sums it up by stating because God has liberated the oppressed they must now accept their freedom by joining God in the fight against injustice and oppression.⁷⁰

Black (liberation) theology is the theological foundation for this project because it directs the oppressed toward a relationship with a savior that is both divine and human. A savior that understands their plight and is concerned about their whole being; not in spite of but because of their color, culture and condition. Thus their transformation is holistic.

⁷⁰ Cone, 212.

Historical Foundation

The church has traditionally collaborated with God, in God's effort to reconcile a fallen humanity. The New Testament Church is a community of diverse people, whose identity is based on their claim to know Jesus as Lord and Savior. The Church exists to continue the mission of God, which was personified in Jesus' ministry as recorded in the Gospels. Thus the Church is blessed with the power of the Holy Spirit to be a light for the world. And to establish God's kingdom on earth and to help those who have been historically neglected. This paper will chronicle the evolution of mission from the early church until the present.

Although the church is commonly viewed as a New Testament phenomenon, we cannot fully understand its history without looking at God's relationship with Israel. God's concern and love for humanity is evident as God initiates a special relationship with Abraham; and uses him to first bless the nation of Israel and subsequently the entire world. Gordon Heath concurs with this concept by asserting the Jews believed that their God had established a special relationship with them. He had chosen them as his special people to fulfill certain obligations, thus their history reminds them of their participation in God's plan.⁷¹

Israel's history is one that has been impacted by oppression of every kind. Their response in these situations is paramount as it pertains to both church history and mission. Since her beginning the Church has faced opposition however she has continued to persevere because of her relationship with the God of Israel. Dale Irvin and Scott

⁷¹ Gordon L. Heath, *Doing Church History: A User-friendly Introduction to Researching the History of Christianity* (Toronto, Canada: Clements Publishing, 2008), 32.

Sunquist offer insight on this matter by suggesting that early Christians emerged from Israel, a nation which endured several centuries of slavery and oppression at the hands of various empires and emperors.⁷² However this did not negate the fact that God had made a covenant with Abraham that provided them with the assurance of God's continuous help. Irvin and Sunquist assert although Israel was under duress, they maintained to a certain degree their own independence. Subsequently they were able to thrive politically under judges and kings.⁷³

The height of Israel's political influence came in the reign of David and his son Solomon who were instrumental in the building of the first temple.⁷⁴ The temple stood until 586 BCE, when it was destroyed by the Babylonians. It was eventually rebuilt and lasted until 70 CE, when it was destroyed again by the Romans. Irvin and Sunquist surmise that the story of the Temple's fate at the hands of foreign powers is important because it depicts the experience of Israel and the ruling nations and empires that surrounded it.⁷⁵ The influence of these nations impacted the religious make up of Israel as it pertained to their understanding of God's mission.

Although Israel remained a monotheistic nation, there were several variants of Judaism. This was the result of the different cultures that were weaved into Judaism over the years. All of the sects of Judaism recognized the import of the temple and the Torah

⁷² Dale T. Irvin and Scott W. Sunquist, *History of the World Christian Movement* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2001), 10.

⁷³ Ibid., 11.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 10.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 11.

but there were different ideologies.⁷⁶ Hence the competing schools of interpretation and the influence of other cultures such as the Egyptians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, Romans and Parthians combined to make for a diversity of religious practices. Thus the Judaism being practiced was far from being unified.⁷⁷

The different cultures present in Israel impacted the political landscape as much as it did the religious. Beginning with the Maccabean revolt of 167-164 BCE and ending with the attack from the Romans in 70CE, Israel would be divided into several jurisdictions. One such group was the Hasmoneans, who occupied Jerusalem and the surrounding areas of Judea and Perea. This group was important because it produced Antipater, the father of Herod the Great, who with the help of Rome served as king of Judea from 37 to 4 BCE. Because of their ties to the Romans, the Herod family would rule for several years prior to and after the birth of Christ.⁷⁸

Although Judaism was spreading to other nations, the act of recruiting new converts, mission, was done solely by God's activities among God's people. God's compassion reaches out not only to Israel, but to other nations as well. Yes, Israel was special to God however God was attempting to reach the whole of humanity. David Bosch, the premier missiologist, opines that since Israel would neither go to other nations, nor compel other nations to come to Jerusalem, that God had to do God's own mission work.⁷⁹ To get the attention of Jews and non Jews God had to show that Israel's

⁷⁶ Ibid., 11.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 11.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 13.

⁷⁹ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1991), 19.

God was more reliable than the other gods they served. Hence, Bosch claims “if there is a missionary in the Old Testament, it is God.”⁸⁰

God would continue God’s solo mission efforts until approximately 3BCE, when God decides to dwell among humanity in a fleshy shell. Irvin and Sunquist convey that Nazareth, the place of Jesus’ birth was a small community of about two hundred and that the residents were facing social unrest and a bad economy.⁸¹ The people like their ancestors were looking for a way out of bondage. Their bondage included more than just spiritual shortcomings as some would like to believe. Rather they were also facing a litany of other oppressive issues. Therefore mission had to be intentionally holistic. Hence God devises a mission plan that would speak to the whole human. God sends the messiah whom the prophets spoke about centuries before.

The bible is instrumental at this juncture, particularly the book of Luke, because it records both the birth of Jesus and the census ordered by Caesar. According to Bosch the census occurred in AD 6 and solidified Rome’s hold on the Jews.⁸² This concurs with the information of Irvin and Scott who opine that Caesar’s decree, along with other cultural influences from Rome would impact the ministry of Jesus and those who were a part of the latter movement, called Christianity.⁸³ Jesus continued to grow until it was time to take the reins of the mission from John. This would occur around Jesus’ thirtieth birthday when he was baptized by John in the Jordan River⁸⁴.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 19.

⁸¹ Irvin and Sunquist, 15.

⁸² Bosch, 25.

⁸³ Irvin and Sunquist, 22.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 23.

Shortly afterward, Jesus began an itinerant ministry, by selecting a group of commoners, (disciples) to assist him with his mission which at this time was focused on the lost (sinners) of Galilee, and those who were marginalized.⁸⁵ However his attention would soon change to include other nations and ethnicities. Irvin and Sunquist highlight this fact by stating the following:

While his travels took him primarily among Jews in Galilee and Judea, on several occasions he journeyed into regions beyond Israel. He had several favorable encounters with Samaritans, and one journey into Decapolis, a region of federated Hellenistic cities to the east of the Jordan River.⁸⁶

Jesus and his disciples would continue their mission, offering hope to all of humanity for approximately three years. Their efforts were frowned upon by religious leaders who accused them, mainly Jesus of blasphemy.⁸⁷ This trumped charge would eventually lead to Jesus' death. God's mission appears to be in jeopardy of being derailed, just as it was gaining momentum. On the contrary his death, which caused the disciples to scatter, proved to be the catalyst that catapulted the movement to another level.

Irvin suggests that the events following Jesus' death, namely the day of Pentecost set the expanding vision of God's mission in motion, which was summarized in the closing words of Matthew; "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations."⁸⁸ The scattering of the disciples and the subsequent reunion and addition of others would eventually lead to them being known as Christians.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 23.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 24.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 25.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 26.

The church according to Howard Culbertson of Southern Nazarene University began in approximately 30 CE, during Pentecost while the followers of Jesus were gathered in Jerusalem.⁸⁹ Dale Irvin and Scott Sunquist maintain the first Christians shared the history and experiences of being Jewish and the memories of the exodus and exile in the context of the first century.⁹⁰ The Church according to Richard Menninger is the true Israel; the long awaited people of God; the ones who accept God's offer of salvation and walk in his ways.⁹¹ Darrell Guder strengthens this point of view by asserting God's mission began with the call of Israel and continues today in the worldwide witness of churches in every culture.⁹²

The Early Years

Because Israel was the center of God's mission, many of the activities of the early church occurred in or nearby Jerusalem. Bosch declares the disciples had the sacred duty to proclaim to Israel its last chance for repentance; and failure to do so would be a sign of their unfaithfulness.⁹³ Culberston maintains that Israel would remain the epicenter of mission until 39 CE, when Peter began to preach to the Gentiles.⁹⁴

⁸⁹ Howard Culbertson, A chronology of Church History, April 28, 2011, <http://home.snu.edu/~hculbert/> (accessed June 29, 2011).

⁹⁰ Irvin and Sunquist, 10.

⁹¹ Richard E. Menninger, *Israel and the Church in the Gospel of Matthew* (New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 1994), 11.

⁹² Darrell Guder, *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 4.

⁹³ Bosch, 41.

⁹⁴ Culbertson, 1.

Although the Christian community was more receptive than their Jewish counterparts, Gentiles in general were not considered full pledged members. As a matter of fact it was a disagreement among the believers, (Acts 6) that necessitated the disciples calling a meeting to recruit a few men to assist them with the business of the church; so they could continue with the mission of spreading the word of hope for those who were oppressed.

The Hebrews believed their mission was limited to Jerusalem, whereas the Hellenists, Greek speaking Jews, believed that the Spirit and not the Law was the driving force for the believer.⁹⁵ This difference in ideology caused the Hellenists to become scattered, thus allowing them to communicate with other ethnicities. Both Bosch and Acts 11 record how impressive the move was toward the Gentiles, particularly those who were in Antioch. The Hellenists were so vital to the whole of God's mission because it was through them that the first century church would experience exponential growth. Bosch asserts that they were so important to the spread of the gospel that the Jerusalem leaders did not want to hinder this Gentile Christian community.⁹⁶

Although the leaders accepted them, the differences between the factions would continue for several years during the first century. Bosch provides clarity by stating:

Differences about the issues persisted until the Jewish War, when the temple was destroyed. Of all the sects, only the Pharisees were able to continue. They would soon impose restrictions on Jewish Christians that made it impossible for them to worship in the synagogue, totally banning them in AD 85. However this did not spell the end of the Jesus movement.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Bosch, 43.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 46.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 46.

Instead Bosch records the community's sense of mission made it impossible for its members to do otherwise; once their horizon had been widened infinitely there really was no possibility of turning back. The church had irrevocably taken its "leap for life."⁹⁸ The mission would thrive through the apostles and the mass of new disciples that joined the movement along the way. One convert Saul of Tarsus (Paul) would become perhaps the greatest missionary besides Jesus. The once hated and violent tyrant would have an encounter with the movement leader that changes his life forever.

Again it is Bosch who brings clarity by providing an in depth analysis of mission from the writings of a few New Testament writers. Bosch selection of Matthew, Luke and Paul provides a great foundation for the study of mission because it covers mission to the Jewish Christian and the "Great Commission" in the gospel of Matthew; the unity between the mission of Jesus and the early church through the pen of Luke; and the missionary activities of Paul unto the Gentiles.⁹⁹ Matthew and Luke mentions the effect that mission had on those in and around Jerusalem, but it was Paul and his colleagues that catapulted mission into Rome and beyond. The church would continue to grow through the first century even with opposition. Irvin and Sunkuist contend the Christian Mission experienced growth in the shadows of Rome's imperial culture by acquiescing to the Rulers of the imperial city.¹⁰⁰

This caused concern in the Jewish Christian community, so around 95CE Rabbi Gamaliel visited Rome to talk with the emperor in an attempt to strengthen the

⁹⁸ Ibid., 47.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 55.

¹⁰⁰ Irvin and Sunkuist, 74.

relationship between them and Rome.¹⁰¹ The initial results of the meeting between Gamaliel and the emperor were good. The church grew and developed into one of the strongest and more vibrant institutions in Rome. The organizational structure of the church was established and foreigners were permitted to assemble without interference.¹⁰²

Things would change in the second century with the martyr of prominent Christian leaders such as Ignatius and Justin. However, the threat of martyrdom and imminent danger on every side did little to stifle the growth of the church. Instead the church grew from house to house and city to city.¹⁰³ Many new converts were added to the numbers and the gospel was being preached as far north as Africa. There continued to be martyrs but instead of silencing the mission it had the opposite effect. Irvin and Sunquist explain it this way:

The faithfulness and courage that martyrs showed in the face of death served to strengthen and encourage the commitment of other believers and drew new people into the community. Thus it was that a period of rapid growth set in following the first waves of persecution and martyrdom.¹⁰⁴

Because of martyrdom the mission would spread from Rome, where emperors were converted, into other cultures such as: Africa, Alexandria, Egypt, Spain and every major city in between. Bosch asserts the Christian churches outside the borders of the Roman Empire were far more active in mission than the main church, whose focus

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 76.

¹⁰² Ibid., 78.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 80.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 82.

remained local.¹⁰⁵ The mission started locally with Jesus and migrated with the disciples into every culture. Hence the commission of Jesus to his disciples in both the gospel of Matthew and the book of Acts are evident throughout the strands of the early Church.

Mission in the Middle Ages

The Middle Age was somewhat of a bitter sweet time for the church. Although she continued to expand into India, central Asia and China during the early part of the seventh century, the church faced fierce opposition from the indigenous religions such as Islam that were already established.¹⁰⁶ Perhaps more important were the internal struggles that erupted between the Augustinians and Donatists. Bosch conveys that during this time the Universal (catholic) Church, which gravitated toward Augustine's view, argued that mission was based on the churches divinity, holiness and immutability; which amount to the "self- realization of the church."¹⁰⁷

This era also produced the "missionary wars" which, according to Bosch was an aggressive war for the sake of expanding Christianity among both those who were adherents and the pagans who were mingled in their communities.¹⁰⁸ Mission during this era was solely for evangelization. Pope Gregory with the blessing of Rome set out to convert all of Europe. His method was somewhat deceptive, in that he pretended to accommodate the worship belief of the indigenous while cleverly manipulating them to

¹⁰⁵ Bosch, 202.

¹⁰⁶ Irvin and Sunquist, 258.

¹⁰⁷ Bosch, 218.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 223.

forego their practices.¹⁰⁹ Although Pope Gregory tactics were different, they were successful as it pertains to mission, because Christianity continued to spread, even with competition from the Muslims.

The battle to colonize Europe would reach its apex in 1453 when the Muslims seized control of Constantinople, which was the spiritual headquarter of the Eastern Church.¹¹⁰ This event changed the way the church viewed her mission. Prior to 1453 the church understood her mission was to preach the gospel to all nations.

Bosch argues that after 1453 mission could best be described as: the activities by which the Western ecclesiastical system was extended into the rest of the world... Mission is the mediation of faith and grace. And the church is the agent of this mediation. Mission is therefore performed by means of a system of authorization and delegation.¹¹¹

This new understanding of mission appears to have motivated the Christians to continue their efforts of evangelizing all of humanity. The tactics used during the middle ages, such as forceful conversion, may not have always been peaceful, but their results cannot be denied. Bosch admits that there were some negative activity employed in those years but the positive results far outweigh the negativity.¹¹² Bosch further suggests that the church needs to rethink her understanding of mission. This rethinking begins by emphasizing that mission was historically viewed by the early church as God's activity toward humanity. Perhaps the cause of this misinterpretation lies in the fact the church defined her activities as doing missions, instead of affirming that any activity of the church was birthed from God's mission.

¹⁰⁹ Irvin and Sunquist, 328

¹¹⁰ Bosch., 226.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 228-29.

¹¹² Ibid., 237.

The Reformation

The reformation period introduced a new design for mission. The questionable methods of the Middle Age caused some Christians to break from the Catholic Church. One of those to sever ties was Martin Luther. Bosch points out that the Reformers did not totally discard the Catholic paradigm that was prevalent in the Middle Ages, rather Luther, Calvin and others altered some of the tenets to make it more viable for this new era in church history.¹¹³ However some critics have suggested that Luther had no concern for mission, focusing instead on those who were already a part of the church. Bosch defends Luther by claiming the church was created by God's word from outside humanity. . . . thus the emphasis for the Reformers is on mission not being dependent on human effort.¹¹⁴ Hence mission was viewed as God's initiative for God's people.

Darrell Guder joins the discussion by conveying the early church's mission, "Christendom," was the result of centuries of Western cultural traditions that formed the church of Jesus Christ.¹¹⁵ The efforts were productive in that many churches were birthed, but their mission was church centered instead of God centered. Guder's view suggests that the church had lost focus of God's original plan, which was to develop a relationship with humanity, for one that was interested in adding bodies to fill large edifices.

¹¹³ Ibid., 240.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 241.

¹¹⁵ Darrell Guder, *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1998), 4.

This would change in the 1700's with the Pietist movement. This new group believed mission was not merely an activity of the church but of Christ through the Spirit.¹¹⁶ This movement was also instrumental in the developmental stages of the current understanding of mission.

Bosch claims Pietism affected the Protestant missionary idea in the following ways: First, mission could no longer be regarded as the duty of colonial governments. Secondly, it transformed mission into an enterprise with which ordinary Christians could actively participate. Third, it ushered in the age of ecumenism in mission that transcended the usual boundaries of nations and confessions. Fourth, Pietism provided missionary leadership. And fifth it demonstrated what it meant to be totally dedicated to God's mission.¹¹⁷

Pietism was not the lone influential movement of this era, there were others such as the Puritans, who aligned themselves with Calvin's ideology of mission being an extension of Christ's reign; and the church as an intermediary between the exalted Christ and the world.¹¹⁸ This view which is still popular in the postmodern church was strengthened by Gisbertus Voetius who asserts the three goals of mission are conversion, church planting and the manifestation of divine grace. This understanding of mission played an important part in the evangelization of England, Scotland and in the transatlantic colonies, particularly Virginia and Massachusetts.¹¹⁹

The expansion of God's mission into unchartered territory fulfills what Luke records in Acts. The word of hope had finally spread to the new world. For the next several years the church, mainly those who were considered reformers intentionally focused on those who were uninformed about God's mission. This group included the

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 253.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 255.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 256.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 257.

Indians in Massachusetts and the African slaves in Virginia. In their book *An Introduction to Black Church History*, Anne and Anthony Pinn plot God's mission toward the oppressed slave. The Pinn's point out that the Quakers in the seventeenth century, sought to convert slaves and end their spiritual oppression but not their physical oppression. They further claim that many influential colonists believed God had placed Africans under the control of Europeans as part of a providential plan.¹²⁰ The Colonists theory seems to be contradictory to the ideology of Calvin, yet it remained a part of church history for several years.

The Enlightenment Era

The Puritan age eventually ended in the early eighteen century. The new paradigm shift known as the Enlightenment introduced the modern church age. This shift in a manner similar to previous one enhanced the design of mission. Bosch mentions that this period presented new challenges to the church because people were also being influenced by scientific traditions, such as "the Empiricism of Bacon and the Rationalism of Descartes."¹²¹ These research methods opened another chapter in God's mission that considered reason and ration to be just as valuable as the bible, as it pertained to defining mission. Bosch illumines that it was also during this time the church officially severed ties with the state.....this meant the end of state- mission cooperation in the colonies.¹²²

¹²⁰ Anne H. Pinn and Anthony B. Pinn, *Introduction to Black Church History* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2002), 5.

¹²¹ Bosch, 263.

¹²² Ibid., 276.

However this change would prove to be beneficial to the development of modern mission. Bosch maintains that this change was the result of the following three factors: the Great Awakening in the American colonies, the birth of Methodism, and the evangelical revival in Anglicanism.¹²³ Jonathan Edwards a contemporary of John and Charles Wesley is credited with promoting this new movement throughout the colonies; but an Evangelist by the name of George Whitefield deserves some of the credit as well. Bosch claims the preachers of this era were successful because their messages guided the people toward an encounter with the living and present Lord, with an emphasis on God's grace.¹²⁴ The excitement of the people with the energetic style of the revivalists led to growth for many of the involved denominations. Pinn asserts the Baptist and Methodists were the most successful because they avoided catechisms and other religious rigors.¹²⁵ However this new movement was not a cure all against the ideology of rationalism which had permeated all institutions including the church, but it did lay a foundation for the church to build her mission.¹²⁶

Hence a Second Awakening was needed beginning in the early 1800's. Bosch maintain that it was during this time that mission became the great passion of the American churches. This passion was evident by the fact that parishioners from different denominations would band together to perform mission . . . Church renewal and mission were in the air.¹²⁷ It is worth noting that the second Awakening was also a special time

¹²³ Ibid., 277.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 278.

¹²⁵ Pinn, 7.

¹²⁶ Bosch, 279.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 281.

for African slaves. Preachers such as William Wilberforce and William Carey would go to great strides to fight against the injustices of slaves. Pinn notes that the Baptist and Methodists continued to be successful during the second Awakening, as it pertained to converts, but the best missional method belonged to a Presbyterian minister by the name of Charles Colcock Jones.¹²⁸

Pinn says Jones, was interested in extending the missionary efforts beyond the select household slaves to all enslaved Africans.¹²⁹ The development of plantation missions marked a milestone in church history, because it afforded the oppressed an opportunity to have a relationship with the God of Israel, who through Jesus frees them from their slavery, first spiritually and then holistically¹³⁰. This intentional mission effort added many new converts to the Christian faith but it did not end the maltreatment of the slaves at the hands of their masters.

The church of the Enlightenment made great strides in mission during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries because of her passion for those who were lost and oppressed. Bosch claims the missionaries believed they had something valuable to offer to those were marginalized.¹³¹ Thus the imposition of salvation upon those in both Africa and Asia would become the highlight of modern mission.

¹²⁸ Pinn, 9.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 10.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 12.

¹³¹ Bosch, 290.

The Enlightenment era impacted the church in new and exciting ways in regards of soul winning and eradicating the rigors of the European culture, but there is yet more to be done as it pertains to God's mission.

Post Modern Mission

Mission returned to its origin during the Enlightenment era, with its continued activity in both foreign and native countries. This momentum continued with the dawning of the twentieth century. David Bosch sheds light on this perspective by estimating the past half a century or so has initiated a subtle but decisive shift toward understanding mission as God's mission.¹³² Bosch further asserts during preceding centuries mission was understood in a variety of ways. Sometimes it was soteriological or at other times cultural; sometimes it was perceived in ecclesiastical categories: as the expansion of the church or a specific denomination. Sometimes it was defined salvation-historically; as the process by which the world would be transformed into the kingdom of God.¹³³

The notion of mission being an attribute of God was reformulated during the 1950's at the Willingen Conference. Bosch claims that it was at this event the term "mission Dei" became the new concept for the church. Bosch places flesh on this revived concept by saying the new image mission is not primarily an activity of the church, but an attribute of God. Mission is thereby seen as a movement from God to the world; the church is viewed as an instrument for that mission.¹³⁴ Thus the church exists because of

¹³² Ibid., 292.

¹³³ Ibid., 389.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 390.

and not independent of God's mission. The *missio Dei* concept would eventually be modified at the Uppsala Assembly in 1968, to include all of humanity, not just the church, because God's mission is inclusive of all, even those who are oppressed.¹³⁵

David Goatley supports this notion by claiming the love of God causes the Church to make Christ known around the world.¹³⁶ Hence the mission of God has not changed. The oppressed of the world needs the church to come among them in the community. Goatley adds the Church has been called to invest its life and resources for the good of others, especially the impoverished, the unlearned and the sick.¹³⁷

With that in mind the village of Robbins, Illinois with its high poverty rate and disproportionate percentage of oppressed families is the perfect place for the Researcher and church to hone their missional skills. The 2000 census reported fifty eight percent of the 6,135 residents are single parent families with kids between the ages of zero and five. Another forty four percent live beneath the national poverty level.¹³⁸ The people in Robbins, until recently, have historically fellowshiped with the churches in the community. But now they are either staying at home or visiting churches which provide transportation for them. If the mission of God is God's love in action through Christ; the church, namely Greater Christian Unity, must look frequently and critically at her interaction with the community.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 396.

¹³⁶ David E. Goatley, *A Divine Assignment: The Missiology of Wendell Clay Sommerville* (Missouri: Lucas Parks Books, 2010), 12.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 12.

¹³⁸ U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000.

The church faces an uphill battle as it pertains to doing God's mission in the twenty first century. The paradigms of years past need an overhaul or least a revision, to adequately address the concerns of this post modern culture. Mark Russell, in an article in the *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* asserts the church need to construct paradigms that reflect the complexities of our task. He expounds further by stating there is a need to expand our understanding beyond the verbal proclamation of the gospel.... Through revised paradigms that demonstrate both God's intervention through Christ in the affairs of humanity and the need of collaboration among all believers.¹³⁹

Bosch adds to the conversation by suggesting the missional paradigm has to go beyond the traditional motif of salvation only.

It must Bosch claim appeal to images, metaphors, events, and pictures rather than logic or analysis. Therefore one way might be to look at mission in terms of six major "salvific events" portrayed in the New Testament: the incarnation of Christ, his death on the cross, his resurrection on the third day, his ascension, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and the parousia.¹⁴⁰

This suggested paradigm provides the church with the most important resource in fulfilling God's mission; and that is Jesus Christ and his holistic ministry. To be an effective agent the church must mirror what Christ done. Jesus showed us that God's mission is holistic in that it combined all of the aspects of ministry into a whole. Thus there was no need to have several ministries doing the same thing, when all was needed was one that was holistic. From her humble beginning until this present day, the church exists to collaborate with God in God's mission of liberating humanity from all oppression.

¹³⁹ Mark, Russell, *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* ; Vol. 25:2, Summer 2008, 94.

¹⁴⁰ Bosch, 512.

Ronald Sider claims the church properly communicates the Good News of Jesus by word and deed; by proclamation, miracles, acts of mercy and justice, and living out the gospel as a winsome example to others, thus her mission is a holistic and personal.¹⁴¹ The church as community is called to interact with other communities as God's sanctified witness. Consequently her practices must be interwoven in the fabrics of Christ's mission.

In summary the Church exists for the purpose of sharing God's plan for a fallen humanity. She has historically served as God's prophetic voice by proclaiming that there is an alternative to being spiritually and holistically lost. Her mission is collaborative in that she is a partner with God and other agents whose desire is to make a difference in the lives of the poor; and to offer salvation to those who are estranged from God. Hence the Church has a tremendous task before her, but history is on her side.

¹⁴¹ Ronald J. Sider, *One-Sided Christianity? Uniting The Church To Heal A Lost And Broken World* (San Francisco, CA: Zondervan Publishing House, 1993), 76.

CHAPTER FOUR

Methodology

The hypothesis of this project proposes that when the church, particularly Greater Christian Unity, takes an intentional, holistic approach toward mission that addresses the social, emotional and physical maladies as well as spiritual that lower income families will respond positively to the invitation of salvation. The researcher conceived the idea for this project after studying the current mission practices in his context. This led to further dialogue among church leaders. The researcher left those discussions with a renewed determination to enhance both his and the church's understanding of mission(s).

With that in mind, the writer sought advice on this topic from pastors, professors, church leaders, psychologists and non profit directors. The researcher searched for information that was inclusive of the whole man, information that would lead to transformation. Perhaps the best advice came from Nancy Ammerman, who offers the following advice:

One of the best ways to gain insight is to view the congregation, its local environment, worship service and members interactions from the perspective of a first time visitor; or someone who has a special need or belongs to a different race, gender and socioeconomic class.¹

¹ Nancy T. Ammerman and Jackson W. Carroll, *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998), 198.

The researcher, a lifelong member of Greater Christian Unity remembers when the church was diligently working in God's mission as it pertained to the underprivileged. He surmised that there needed to be a collaborative effort between the church and the community, but before that took place, the church needed to be reminded and reeducated about God's mission. He desired to construct a model for mission that would be beneficial to the whole body of Christ, a model that would transform those in the church, the community and world.

Intervention

Greater Christian Unity Missionary Baptist Church is located in the village of Robbins, Illinois. Robbins is one of the poorest communities, in what is known as Cook County. Although the church carries the moniker of being a missional church, its participation in God's mission toward the marginalized is best described as minimal. The researcher, who was installed as Pastor in June 2010, noticed that some members of the congregation appeared to have a nonchalant attitude toward mission. They are faithful in their tithes and offering, and some even go the extra mile and pledge more, but when it comes to mission they are inactive.

The village has forty three other churches besides Greater Christian Unity, but the majority of them are not doing missions, nor are they missional minded. The residents, those who have not totally given up on church, are victims of a myriad of oppressive factors. The median income for a family of four living in the village is under twenty five

thousand dollars.² Consequently, there is always something lacking. Many remain in the community because of their inability to afford housing in one of the more prosperous nearby neighborhoods. Those who are residents often express their concerns to family members who worship at one of the forty four churches. The community is struggling financially as most are and its resources are nearly depleted. A recent online article revealed that Robbins is indebted to the city of Chicago for nearly one million dollars in unpaid water bills.³

The fact that the village is operating in the red has negatively impacted the few businesses and civil services available to the community. The Police and Emergency Medical Technicians are basically volunteering; the only medical attention is through CEDA and there is no pharmacy, food pantry or shelter within five miles of the village center. Yet there are forty four churches, many with available space and resources to provide assistance but they are closed, except for church related meetings.

Since the Church is the largest and most productive group within the community any transformation has to start with God's selected partner. Therefore, the challenge for this research project was to design a holistic model for mission that would transform the church and community. This collaborative model will not only transform current disciples, it will also produce future disciples who understand God's mission. Hence, it will assist in the revitalization of the village of Robbins.

² [www.city-widedata.com.http:// www.city-wide data.com/ neighborhood/Robbins, IL.](http://www.city-widedata.com/neighborhood/Robbins,IL) (accessed February 22, 2011).

³ Ibid., 1.

Research Design

To test the hypothesis the researcher utilized the qualitative research method. John Creswell claims this method is an emergent design due to the nature of the process. “The strategies used in the qualitative method draw on diverse inquiries that have a dramatic influence on the procedures . . . which all vie for center stage.”⁴ For the project to be successful it had to deal with the effect that a lackadaisical mission had on the people in the church and those who were living at or below poverty. Perhaps their attitudes were due to a lack of understanding and not indifference toward the poor. So, the goal of the researcher was to gather information from the participants concerning their understanding of God’s mission and the church’s role in that mission. Ammerman calls this strategy a “process audit and recommends doing it before attempting to study the needs of the congregation.”⁵

The researcher chose the qualitative research method because it allowed him to gauge the attitude change of the focus group regarding mission. It also allowed him to control the questions and the test site. According to Creswell, these elements allow the researcher the opportunity to build a complex and holistic project.⁶ Creswell further suggests that qualitative research affords the researcher with the best chance to design a holistic account as it pertains to the complexity of the issues surrounding the project.⁷

⁴ John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Method Approaches*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2009), 175-76.

⁵ Ammerman, 106.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 249.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 176.

Hence, the researcher believed that the focus group, of twenty two people would provide honest and concise feedback without being pressured.

The participants in the focus group were “purposely selected” based on their ages, longevity in the church and community and income level.⁸ Due to time constraints the group was required to attend all the sessions however those who were unable to attend because of unforeseen personal situations were given a copy of the lecture and questions for that session. This allowed them the opportunity to stay on track with the other participants. Twenty members of the group have been disciples of, or know someone who was a former disciple of Greater Christian Unity. The remaining two participants are recent converts. They have resided in or near the community for several years, so they are familiar with its current plight.

The dynamics of the group represented well those who are disciples of Greater Christian Unity and a large portion of the residents of the community. Ten members are receiving some type of government assistance, such as disability, and WIC. The other twelve are gainfully employed but similar to most people, they are struggling to stay afloat. They all agreed to participate because this project provided an avenue for the church and community to collaborate on the issues that plague the village.

The group was given an introductory questionnaire, (appendix B), to determine their understanding of mission. The questionnaire also provided a place for the participants to share their background information. In addition they were asked to answer honestly to protect the integrity of the project. This would aid in the development of this ministry model.

⁸ Ibid., 178

After the initial meeting the researcher determined that the best way to proceed was to collect data through the modes of group interviews, pre and post surveys, and a six week bible study on mission, supplemented with two sermons. The questions were the same for each survey and contained a place for them to write down suggestions or comments. The group was asked to study the material prior to attending bible study, so they would be able to discuss the concerns that each lesson presented.

The researcher then used the collected data to measure the attitudes of the focus group. The intent of this model is to develop a model which will empower the church by changing their attitudes regarding mission and creating an environment for collaboration between church and community. This model was beneficial to the researcher as well, as it compelled him to thoroughly research the topic being presented.

Measurement

The information from the focus group was validated through multiple sources. The attitudes of the focus group were measured at the beginning of the project and again at its completion. The collected material was then used to document the attitudes of each participant regarding mission to the less fortunate. In addition, the village representatives were given the opportunity to express the concerns of the residents. To protect the integrity of the project, the results were shared with professional associates from various disciplines who were not members of the church and community.

Instrumentation

The focus group met at Greater Christian Unity over a period of six weeks for one and one half hours. A demographic questionnaire requesting personal information was given, followed by a missional questionnaire and a pre- survey related to the understanding and attitudes of mission. The researcher proctored each survey given to the focus group. In addition he taught each bible study session and preached two sermons on mission. An evaluation was passed out after each sermon to measure the effect on the group and the impact it had on the church.

A post- survey was given to the group to determine what if any effect this project had. The questions on the post- survey were the same as the pre- survey. The two sermons were preached at the middle and again toward the end of the process. An exit interview was held at the conclusion so the group could convey their concerns and suggestions. The goal was to determine if educating the group would transform their understanding of God's mission for the twenty- first century church.

Copies of each of the documents are included in the appendix. The documents were anonymously submitted to protect the identities of the participants and to avoid the risk of creating discord. The results were then analyzed and recorded by the researcher.

CHAPTER FIVE

FIELD EXPERIENCE

In August of, 2010, the researcher and newly installed pastor met with the deacons and trustees to inform them of his intent to utilize Greater Christian Unity as the context for his doctoral project. Both boards gave their approval and blessings. After his meeting with them, he addressed the entire church and shared that he would be pursuing a degree in ministry which involved using the history and some of the members as participants. They too offered their approval and support.

The researcher then advised his four context associates of the arduous task ahead. He asked if they were committed to seeing the project completed and they all responded with an “enthusiastic” yes. He further explained to them that they too needed to be knowledgeable as it pertained to being missional so to the researcher met with his associates for lunch and discussed what it means to be a missional church and not just a church that does occasional mission. He asked the associates if they had any idea of what a missional church looked like.

Some of the replies he received were “a missional church follow God’s word.” “A missional church sends missionaries to foreign countries.” “A missional church is one that witness so that others can be saved.” And finally a missional church is “one that willingly portrays and emulates Jesus.” From this meeting the researcher concluded that the best way to introduce his associates to the idea of being missional would be through

the work of Ed Stetzer. In his article titled *The Missional Manifesto*, Stetzer maintains that the missional church is incarnation in that it shares in the *Missio Dei* by proclaiming the gospel in word and witnessing to the world through deeds, especially toward those who are poor.¹⁵¹ The lunch meeting ended with the group collaborating in prayer.

This chapter presents the results of the model and summarizes the new knowledge gained by the researcher. This study was done to measure the transformation of the focus group and ultimately the entire congregation. The results of the project were examined through the collection of data, an analysis of the data and the outcomes. The researcher hypothesized that low income families would respond positively to the invitation of salvation when mission was intentional, holistic and collaborative. To prove this theory, the researcher formed a focus group of twenty- two participants. The site of the test was the Greater Christian Unity Missionary Baptist Church of Robbins, Illinois.

Those selected were given a demographic questionnaire which asked their age, gender, education and socioeconomic status and length of membership. See appendix (A). From this data the researcher ascertained that the group was symbolic of the landscape of the community.

Information received from participants revealed that almost half of them were receiving some type of government assistance. The participants are active disciples of Greater Christian Unity, participating in all areas, with twelve of them being a part of the music ministry. The demographics questionnaire also revealed that nineteen of the twenty-two participants or eighty-six percent are residents in the village, while the other fourteen percent reside in neighboring communities. The data also showed that all the participants were either high school graduates or possessed a GED. Their economic

¹⁵¹ <http://www.missionalmanifesto.net>(accessed 2/3/2012).

portfolio was akin to others in the community in that they too are counted among the working poor. After meeting with the group, the researcher constructed the following questionnaire to gauge their understanding in the areas of mission, collaborative leadership and social justice.

1. What is the definition of mission?
2. What is your understanding of God's mission?
3. What is the current mission practice of Greater Christian Unity?
4. What is the role of the church as it pertains to social justice?
5. What is your understanding of collaborative leadership?
6. Should the church collaborate with the community?
7. Have you ever heard the term missional?
8. Do you understand what it means to be holistic?
9. Is mission solely for those who are in the church?
10. What motivates you to serve God?

The results of the questionnaire revealed that eighty-one percent defined mission as outreach. The percentage decreased to twenty-eight percent when they were asked their understanding of God's mission. Those that expressed an understanding stated "God's mission is to save those who are lost." When asked if they knew the mission practice of Greater Christian Unity, sixty-eight percent responded "our mission is to learn more about God's mission so that we can minister to others." When it comes to social justice only 27 percent answered favorably. The remaining 73 percent was unsure. When asked about collaborative leadership, 68 percent claimed that "collaborative leadership is

when we volunteer to work with others.” The same 68 percent agreed that the church members should volunteer for community activities.

In regards to the term missional only 18 percent had heard the term; while the numbers increased to 53 percent when asked to define holistic. The questionnaire further revealed that 79 percent of the group believed that mission should be solely for those who are members of the church. The questionnaire also revealed was that 95% of the group claimed love as their motivation for serving

Implementation

The information generated from the questionnaires resulted in the development and implementation of a pretest survey. The survey was administered in the fall of 2011 prior to Wednesday night bible study. The survey consisted of eight statements that required a yes or no response. The researcher presented the following statements to the twenty –two participants who are members of the church.

Statement 1- I belong to a missional church.

Yes	37%
No	63%

The pre- survey revealed that only 37 percent or eight of the twenty-two participants believed that they belong to a missional church.

Statement 2- I am prepared for mission.

Yes	22%
No	78%

Initially, 22 percent or five of the twenty-two participants believed they were prepared for mission.

Statement 3- I can articulate God's mission.

Yes	72%
No	28%

The survey initially showed that 72 percent of the participants believed they could articulate God's mission. However it should be noted that God's mission for them was simply saving souls.

Statement 4- I understand what it means to be holistic.

Yes	53%
No	47%

The survey showed that 53 percent of the participants had an understanding of what it means to be holistic. Yet their efforts did not agree with this number.

Statement 5- There should be collaboration between church and community.

Yes	28%
No	72%

In the beginning 28 percent of the group believed there should be some type of collaboration between the church and the community. This low percentage was due to the fact that the elder members in the group had been taught that politics and church should never commingle.

Statement 6- Evangelism and mission are the same.

Yes	68%
No	32%

The pre- survey initially showed that 68 percent of the group believed that evangelism and mission was the same. The high percentage was the result of years of combining the two ministries.

Statement 7- Mission should be intentional.

Yes	81%
No	19%

The pre- survey showed that 81 percent of the participants believed that mission should be intentional. This high percentage was again based on the fact that most of the elder members of the group remembered when Greater Christian Unity had a vibrant mission ministry.

Statement 8- I believe the church should be doing more as it pertains to the underprivileged.

Yes	86%
No	14%

The survey initially showed that 86 percent of the participants believed that the church should be doing more as it pertains to the underprivileged. This high percentage was encouraging for the researcher because it supported his theory that people will do more when they are educated.

The Greater Christian Unity Focus Group

With these results the researcher surmised that there needed to be some discussion concerning both God's mission and the role the church has in carrying out that mission. The objective of this project was to design a model for mission that would be both holistic and transformative. A model that would benefit both the church and the village by educating each group as it pertains to the importance of collaboration between church

and society. With that in mind the researcher concluded that the best way to accomplish his goal was through the use of bible studies and sermons.

The focus group met for six consecutive weeks. The group studied several passages during the process that depicted God at work with and for humanity. The sessions were intense in nature because of the vast amount of information. The group was encouraged to read the text before each session and ask any questions they had as it pertained to mission and being missional.

The researcher began each study with prayer from various persons in the group which was then followed by a brief synopsis of the passages that were being taught. He also preached two sermons at the middle and end of the project. The bible studies outlines are included in appendix (D).

The titles for the six bible studies included the following:

Lesson One: Knowing God's Mission- This lesson provided the group with a biblical foundation from Isaiah 61:1-4 and Matthew 25:34-40 for knowing and understanding God's mission as it pertained to those who were poor and misaligned by defining mission. The researcher initiated the discussion by asking the group to describe God's mission. This session lasted for two hours because there were many in the group who had no knowledge of God's mission. They opined that the charitable thing the church does for those who are members was as far as mission goes. The session ended with prayer and a concise evaluation.

Statements	Yes	No
1. The lesson was clearly taught and informative.	100%	0%
2. The lesson encouraged me to be more involved.	90%	10%
3. The lesson will benefit the entire church.	90%	10%
4. The lesson depicted God's mission.	80%	20%
5. The lesson changed/enhanced my attitude regarding mission.	90%	10%

Lesson Two: God's Mission for the Oppressed. The scripture for this lesson was taken from Exodus 1:8-14, 2:23-25, 3:4-10 and 4:10-17. This lesson looked at mission through the lens of slavery. It demonstrated God's concern for God's people who were oppressed by an unjust Pharaoh. It further highlighted the need for the people of God to be involved in the struggles of those who faced with social injustices. The researcher began with prayer. He then asked the group should the church be concerned about social justice. The older members of the group, those over sixty-five, suggested that the church and community should remain separate. However they agreed with the consensus when it came to the church being more involved.

Statements	Yes	No
1. The lesson was clearly taught and informative.	100%	0%
2. The lesson encouraged me to be more involved.	70%	30%
3. The lesson will benefit the entire church.	90%	10%
4. The lesson depicted God's mission.	100%	0%
5. The lesson changed/enhanced my attitude regarding mission.	70%	30%

Lesson Three: The Biblical Mission of the Church. The following scriptures were used: Matthew 28:18-20, Mark 16:15, Luke 24:47, John 20:21 and Acts 2:42. This lesson provided the group with a synoptic view of Jesus' mission; the subsequent commissioning of the disciples and the importance of the Holy Spirit in God's mission. It also highlighted how the church should interact with others in both the faith and secular community. The session began with prayer, followed with an inquiry from the group concerning the collaboration of church and community.

The group expressed their concern regarding the lack of involvement between the churches as it pertained to the poor in the community. Many shared how they were once among those who had to look for assistance from other charitable agencies outside the community. They also conveyed how cold hearted some Christians were toward them before they joined the church. They further voiced their dissatisfaction with the leaders in the community.

Statements	Yes	No
1. The lesson was clearly taught and informative.	100%	0%
2. The lesson encouraged me to be more involved.	70%	30%
3. The lesson will benefit the entire church.	90%	10%
4. The lesson depicted God's mission.	80%	20%
5. The lesson changed/enhanced my attitude regarding mission.	70%	30%

Lesson Four: Developing a Missional Church I- The researcher employed the following passages: Genesis 3:1-9, Isaiah 6:1-8, John 1:11-14 and John 3:16. This study focused on the fall of humanity, their subsequent failures and God's rescue. Therefore

this lesson provided the group with an overview of the dynamics needed to develop a missional church. One of the context associates led us in prayer and the researcher began the discussion by declaring the church has failed in its mission. He continued by suggesting that most churches are just gathering places for people to come on Sunday so they would have something to talk about during the week. The researcher was astonished to find that more than half of the group agreed with his presumption.

Statements	Yes	No
1. The lesson was clearly taught and informative.	100%	0%
2. The lesson encouraged me to be more involved.	60%	40%
3. The lesson will benefit the entire church.	90%	0%
4. The lesson depicted God's mission.	80%	20%
5. The lesson changed/enhanced my attitude regarding mission.	70%	30%

Lesson Five: Developing a Missional Church II: The following passages were used for this lesson. Luke 14:13-21, 2Cor. 5:18-21, Hebrews 13:1-3 and James 2:1-7. This study provided the group with an in depth look at God's people in mission with God toward those who were marginalized, weak and socially ostracized. The researcher utilized passages that showed the intentional mission of Jesus to those who were disabled, young, sick and considered worthless. The researcher began the session by reading II Cor. 5:18-21.

He then asked one of the group members to lead the prayer. Afterward the researcher asked the group if they knew the role of an ambassador. This led to a further discussion of being called a slave for Christ. We ended the discussion by surmising that a

missional church understands that it is called to work with God in God's master plan. This plan is holistic in that it ministers to every aspect of the human. The evaluation from this lesson is provided below.

Statements	Yes	No
1. The lesson was clearly taught and informative.	100%	0%
2. The lesson encouraged me to be more involved.	90%	10%
3. The lesson will benefit the entire church.	90%	10%
4. The lesson depicted God's mission.	80%	20%
5. The lesson changed/enhanced my attitude regarding mission.	90%	10%

Lesson Six: The Missional Church at Work. The researcher used the following pericopes: Matthew 15:32-38; Mark 6:7-12; Acts 15:23-28; Romans 12:1-2. The final study reviewed God's mission to all of humanity, through the sending of Christ. It also highlighted Jesus' personal mission and the impact it had on the community. It further provided the group with suggestions on how to properly respond to those who refuse to hear the message. The researcher initiated the discussion by asking what was it that compelled Jesus to intentionally minister to the "least of these." The group responded in unison that it was "love" that compelled Jesus to extend mission to those who were hurting. They also agreed with the researcher's notion that God's mission required much sacrifice. The results of the evaluation was tallied and recorded below.

As fore mentioned the researcher also preached two sermons on being missional. The first one was preached on October 23, 2011 during morning service. The scripture used was Isaiah 61:1-4. The title was *God's Missional Plan*. In his presentation the researcher concluded that God's missional plan was intentionally inclusive of those who were oppressed. He further opined that the village of Robbins was akin to Israel during this time in their history in that the citizens of Robbins are mired in some of the worst conditions in their existence.

The researcher challenged the congregation to rise above their protocol and take an active part in the revitalization of the village. If the citizens are going to experience change it is going to take a missional minded church. The evaluation for this sermon is noted below.

Statements	Yes	No
1. The lesson was clearly taught and informative.	100%	0%
2. The lesson encouraged me to be more involved.	90%	10%
3. The lesson will benefit the entire church.	90%	10%
4. The lesson depicted God's mission.	80%	20%
5. The lesson changed/enhanced my attitude regarding mission.	90%	10%

The researcher preached his second sermon on Wednesday November 23, 2011 during thanksgiving eve service. The scripture for the evening was taken from Matthew 25:34-40, and the title of the sermon was *Don't Forget about the Least of Them*. The researcher posited that the church often forget about those who are marginalized as they are enjoying their extravagant dinners.

He further suggested that the church should be more concerned about others, mainly those who are living at or beneath poverty in her own backyard.

He also conveyed the poor people in the community would respond favorably to the call of salvation when the church showed an interest in their plight. He then reminded them that as the people of God we have a moral as well as a spiritual responsibility to the less fortunate. He concluded the sermon by inviting his context associates and a few other leaders to join with him and members of the focus group at a nearby shelter to assist with their thanksgiving feeding. Similar to the previous sermon the focus group was asked to evaluate its effectiveness. The results are listed below.

Statements	Yes	No
1. The lesson was clearly taught and informative.	100%	0%
2. The lesson encouraged me to be more involved.	100%	0%
3. The lesson will benefit the entire church.	90%	10%
4. The lesson depicted God's mission.	90%	10%
5. The lesson changed/enhanced my attitude regarding mission.	100%	0%

Final Session

The final group session was held on November 30, 2011. The meeting consisted of the researcher, three of his associates and all twenty-two members of the focus group. The session began with prayer and a brief review of past events. The group was then

given an opportunity to express their concerns and criticisms of the project. Some of those responses are listed below:

1. "There was too much information."
2. "The whole church should have been required to attend."
3. "It is a good plan but it probably will not work at our church."
4. "In the past village trustees and representatives could not be trusted, so what is the difference now?"
5. "Other churches probably won't get involved."
6. "People just don't care about others."
7. "Churches are busy with their own agendas."
8. "The church should not be involved in politics."
9. "Let the government do their part, since they have more money than the church."
10. "We face the risk of violence and other crimes when we allow some of those in the community to frequent our facilities."
11. "We have to be careful not to open ourselves up to any trouble."
12. "Let some of the other churches do something, we always go above what they are doing."

After listening to their concerns and suggestions the researcher asked the group for suggestions on how the church and community could bridge the wide gap in their relationship. Those suggestions are listed below.

1. "Have more meetings between pastors and village representatives."

2. “A collaborative effort between churches as it pertains to providing food and temporary shelter.”
3. “More participation from churches during community gatherings.”
4. “Pastors need to encourage their members to attend the monthly village meeting.”
5. “Pastors must encourage their members to vote.”
6. “Churches need to join the village during their town hall meetings with state and federal representatives.”
7. “Continue to promote those efforts that will generate new business venues.”

From these responses of the researcher ascertained that there needed to be a holistic model for mission that would educate, empower and edify the church, while at the same time improving the community. The meeting concluded with the researcher thanking the group for their participation and informing them that he was excited about the potential implementation of this missional project in the very near future. He also encouraged them to continue attending bible class and future missional planning.

Afterwards the researcher provided the group with instructions and administered a post survey that was identical to the pre survey. The group was asked to remain in the fellowship hall when they were done so they could participate in a group exit interview. The post survey and data analysis are listed below.

PRE AND POST SURVEY RESPONSES

Statement One: I belong to a missional church.

PRE	POST
Yes- 37%	Yes- 87%
No- 63%	No-13%

Data Analysis

When the project began 37 percent of the participants claimed they belonged to a missional church. This number increased to 87 percent at the completion of the project. This represented a substantial increase, but there was still room for improvement. The group admittedly reserved their answers out of fear of sounding uninformed.

Statement Two: I am prepared for mission.

PRE	POST
Yes- 22%	Yes- 80%
No- 78%	No-20%

Data Analysis

In the beginning, a small percentage, 22% conveyed they were prepared for mission. After completing the six weeks bible study, the percentage increased to eighty.

This increase was attributed to the intentional passage selection used throughout the project. The Exodus passages used during week two were influential because it showed the group that God has always been concerned about those who were oppressed.

Statement Three: I can articulate God's mission.

PRE	POST
Yes- 28%	Yes- 90%
No- 72%	No-10%

Data Analysis

In the beginning of the project, only 28% could intelligibly describe God's mission. This meant that only six out of the twenty-two disciples of Greater Christian Unity had an understanding of God's mission. However, this would change dramatically by the end of the project, when the number increased to 90%. The lesson from week one was likely responsible for this increase because it defined and highlighted God's mission. The researcher revisited this statement throughout the project for the purpose of gauging the responses of the focus group.

Statement Four: I understand what it means to be holistic.

PRE	POST
Yes- 54%	Yes- 81%
No- 46%	No-19%

Data Analysis

Initially only, 54% or twelve out of twenty- two of the participants claimed to understand what it means to be holistic. The idea of mission being anything but spiritual did not fare well in the beginning because many did not know how to define holistic. This percentage increased to 81% with eighteen out of the twenty-two participants claiming to understand what it means to be holistic. The results showed that the lessons improved their understanding by increasing the number of participants that understood by 66%.

Statement Five: There should be collaboration between church and community.

PRE	POST
Yes- 68%	Yes- 90%
No- 32%	No-10%

Data Analysis

When the project began 68% or fifteen out of twenty-two agreed that there should be some kind of collaboration between the church and the community. This number increased to 90% or twenty out of twenty-two participants at the conclusion of the project. This equated to an increase of 61%. This showed that transformation was possible when there was a constant and intentional focus on being missional.

Statement Six: Evangelism and mission are the same.

PRE	POST
Yes- 72%	Yes- 63%
No- 28%	No-37%

When the program started 72%, or sixteen out of twenty-two opined that evangelism and mission are the same. After the sessions were completed the number actually decreased to 63%. Although the majority still agreed that evangelism and mission are the same, the small decrease showed an improvement in the group understanding of being missional. The decrease further demonstrated that parishioners were willing to change when they are informed.

Statement Seven: Mission should be intentional.

PRE	POST
Yes- 81%	Yes- 100%
No- 19%	No-0%

Data Analysis

When the program started 81% or eighteen out of twenty-two of the participants opined that mission should be intentional. At the conclusion of the program this number increased to 100% with all of the participants agreeing that mission needed to be intentional instead of occasional. The results showed that members would respond favorably when they are educated regarding God's mission.

Statement Eight: The church should be doing more as it pertains to the underprivileged.

PRE	POST
Yes- 78%	Yes- 86%
No- 22%	No-14%

Data Analysis

In the beginning of the program 78% or seventeen out of twenty-two of the participants opined that the church should be doing more as it pertains to the underprivileged. This number increased to 86% or nineteen of the participants at the conclusion of the program. The researcher credited this increase to lesson five which highlighted Jesus' interaction with the poor and other marginalized people.

Exit Interview

The researcher performed an exit interview, (Appendix E), to obtain suggestions and further feedback regarding the success of his project. The group was asked to be honest and respectful. To expedite the process the researcher posed the following questions:

1. How can the community improve its reputation?
2. What can the church(s) do to assist the poor in the community?
3. How can the members get involved?
4. What can be done to improve the services in the village?
5. What role if any does the Pastor have in improving conditions in the village?
6. What can the church do to make sure that future parishioners understand the importance of collaboration between church and community?

Outcome

The results from the questionnaires, surveys and exit interview revealed that all the participants agreed that there should be some collaboration between Greater Christian Unity Missionary Baptist Church and the village of Robbins, Illinois. And that this collaboration can be successful when both entities pushed each other to remain consistent. In addition the focus group from Greater Christian Unity expressed a desire to learn more about being missional. They further conveyed that the whole church needed to be educated. Similarly the researcher stressed the importance of educating the church and community simultaneously. He surmised that he would periodically communicate with

the village, while at the same time utilizing this valuable information during bible study and leadership meeting.

CHAPTER SIX

REFLECTION, SUMMARY, AND CONCLUSION

Reflections of the Journey

This chapter presents a summary and reflection of the challenges, both individual and corporate, that arise whenever there is change. This chapter also explains the researcher's proposed model for mission in the twenty-first century. The researcher shares his thoughts as they pertain to the collaboration of church and community, and further surmises that this project was successful for both the church and community because it provided a platform for continued communication between the two entities.

This research in ministry project created an opportunity for the researcher to look critically at the mission efforts of the Greater Christian Unity Missionary Baptist Church of Robbins, Illinois. As a life long member and newly installed Pastor, the researcher recalled when the church was more active in its mission efforts so, he desired to revive and transform the attitudes of the parishioners as it pertained to God's mission. He was motivated by the fact that many of the parishioners either lived in the housing projects or knew someone that lived there, thus the foundation for the project was already laid.

Nevertheless, he experienced mixed emotions when it was time to present the project to the church. Those feelings would eventually subside, but the researcher still had to overcome other obstacles. For instance, after only six months in office the researcher had to deal with a deacon board that was sometimes ungodly, hire a new

musician and make other unpopular decisions. The researcher discovered very early that being a member of the church does not necessarily make for a smooth transition.

In an attempt to move the congregation forward the researcher employed several passages to stress the importance of spiritual disciplines such as scripture, prayer, fasting and servitude. Thankfully, after much prayer, combined with advice and encouragement from his predecessor, the researcher continued to persevere. Moreover, the congregation began to accept him as their pastor and not just one of the associates. This transformation occurred toward the end of summer in 2010, after a month long sermon series entitled

Getting Back To Basics.

From that point the church began to grow in numbers with new members joining every Sunday. As a new pastor the researcher was pleased with the new members, but he admittedly had reservations because several of them had family ties to other members. As time progressed, the researcher met monthly with ministry leaders to assess the various ministries and activities of the church. From those meeting the researcher concluded that the most productive method of growing the church was through education, an intentional missional focused education that highlighted the church's involvement in God's mission.

The researcher believed that the best way to reach the un-churched, poverty stricken residents and others in this small, but historically rich community was through education. This meant that the current members had to be re-educated about God's mission toward the poor and the mission statement of the church. This would consume a large amount of time, perhaps time the researcher did not have.

He wanted so badly to change the attitudes of the members but felt the time constraints of his secular job would not allow adequate time for his research.

The researcher sought advice from others whose situations were similar and they overwhelmingly suggested that he utilize his context associates to assist him throughout the project. With this information, the researcher was more motivated than before to begin. He spent the entire month of September 2010 interviewing prospective associates and gathering resources. He initially selected eight associates but settled with the four who showed an interest in both the project and its implementation. Next he shared the idea for his project with several members, deacons, trustees and eventually the entire church.

With the approval and blessings of the ministry leaders and church the researcher began the project by locating related resources. The subject of mission provided the researcher with a wealth of information, but when it came to being missional the resources dwindled. However, this did not deter the researcher. He spent several hours visiting local libraries and online sites that contributed to his project. He surmised that the members of Greater Christian Unity would do better when they understood God's mission. Thus, this project provided an opportunity for the researcher to learn alongside his parishioners.

However, the researcher soon discovered that his thoughts were different than some of the eldest members. Because of their desire to remain a family church, they expressed concern that we were exposing ourselves to the undesirables of the community. This endeavor was going to be more painstaking than anything the researcher had attempted. He contemplated more than once withdrawing from the program until a later

date, but each time his peers from United Theological Seminary, especially those from the Collaborative Leadership focus group and other close associates encouraged him to continue.

The researcher continued the project with renewed vigor and excitement. He shared weekly with his peers on his progress and concerns. He and a few of his peers prayed for each other via telephone every Sunday morning before heading out to church. This proved to be beneficial for both the project and life. The collaboration with other preachers in prayer and general dialogue was most helpful for this researcher, who was also experiencing his first pastorate. Furthermore, the weekly phone conversations allowed him to step away from the rigors of the pastorate for a few minutes so that he could be revived and energized through the prayers and words of his colleagues who had been in pastors longer than him.

Similarly, the researcher appreciated the support and advice he received from his mentors throughout this process. The mentors, Dr. Hairston and Dr. Dalton often reminded the researcher and his peers to “trust the process.” Although it seemed like an easy thing to do, the researcher admittedly had doubts. It appeared at times as if the process was counter productive, especially as the process came to an end. The researcher expressed his concerns to Dr. Dalton regarding how hard things had become after the October peer session with trying to juggle a secular job, pastor and complete the project on time. Again Dr. Dalton encouraged him to “trust the process.” These words proved to be true as the researcher was putting the final chapters together. He finally realized the importance of collaboration.

Summary of Research

The researcher hypothesized that people living in poverty would respond favorably to the invitation of salvation when mission was intentional and holistic. To prove his theory the researcher formed a twenty-four member focus group. The group consisted of twenty-two parishioners from Greater Christian Unity M.B. Church of Robbins, Illinois and two of the village trustees. The researcher provided the group with the guidelines for completing the surveys and bible studies. However he discovered that many in the group did not adequately prepare for the weekly studies. This meant that the group had to spend time each week re-reading the scriptures pertaining to the study.

This frustrated the researcher because the group had previously stated they understood how important the scripture was for the completion of the project. After the first session the researcher asked the group to evaluate the lesson and to his amazement 90% of the group agreed that the lesson was helpful. This encouraged the researcher to continue the lessons. He shared with the group how beneficial the lessons were to him as he studied God's mission and the role the church has in helping God reach those who are poor and often forgotten.

As the sessions continued the group shared with the researcher how they were beginning to understand the concept of being missional and not just performing an occasional mission activity. The researcher then revealed to the group the concerns of the village representatives. He shared how the trustees believed that the lack of collaboration between the churches in the community was a major part of the problem.

He also informed the group that the village was looking forward to working with them on this project.

In the middle of the process the researcher preached a sermon on being missional so that the entire church would have an idea of what the focus group had studied. After the sermon they were asked to do an evaluation. The results showed they overwhelmingly agreed that the sermon was beneficial. The researcher made the results available to his context associates and other ministry leaders for the purpose of keeping them informed on the progress of the project. As expected they were impressed with the progress and encouraged the group to keep up the good work.

The next several weeks included more lessons and one more sermon. The group's understanding of being missional continued to improve with each lesson. After lesson six the researcher evaluated their progress and discovered that the percentage of those understanding God's mission had increased to 90 %. This was remarkable considering the starting percentage was 28%. The twenty-two participants from Greater Christian Unity completed a post survey that revealed growth in every area with the greatest improvement being in the articulation of God's mission and preparation for mission. There was also improvement in the area of evangelism versus mission, where more participants agreed that the two elements are equally important but different.

In a similar manner the two representatives also showed remarkable improvement in their understanding of collaboration between the church and community. The results showed that they favored more interaction among the churches in the community with each other as well as the community. They further agreed that any efforts should be both

intentional and holistic. The researcher was surprised by their understanding of God's mission, mainly because one of them proclaimed to be Muslim.

After the meeting with the representatives the researcher preached his second sermon. As he had done with the first sermon, he asked the group to evaluate the content. The group agreed that the sermon was beneficial for the entire church. With that in mind the researcher gathered the twenty-two members together to do a post survey. The results from the survey revealed that the group had grown exponentially. This proved that the attitudes of members could be transformed when they are properly informed and engaged in the education process.

At the conclusion of the survey the group participated in an exit interview consisting of the following five questions:

1. Should the church assist in the funding of community projects?
2. What role should the church play as it pertains to the poor in the community/
3. How can the church demonstrate God's mission?
4. What role if any should the church have in the political realm?
5. How can we improve the overall attitude of the church toward mission?

The group was asked to be honest but respectful of each other's opinions. The results from the interview are listed below.

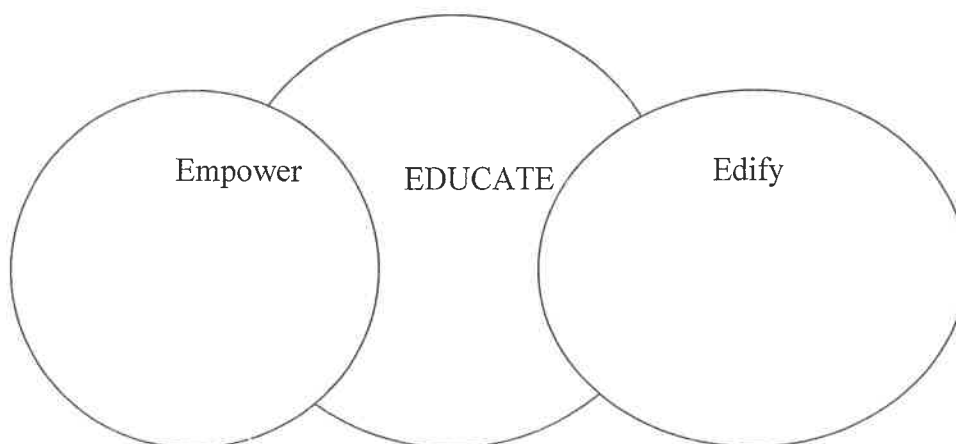
1. The community needs to be honest as it pertains to its fiscal status.
2. The churches in the community need to combine their resources to assist the poor in the community.
3. The churches need to encourage their members to volunteer.
4. The residents need to attend village meetings.

5. Pastors and ministers need to be more visible.

6. The lessons should be taught during new member's class.

From these statements the researcher surmised that there is still much work needed in his own context as well as the larger context when it comes to the collaboration between the church and the community. The results from the educational component further revealed that the participants' attitudes were transformed as it pertained to extending God's mission to those living beneath the poverty level.

Members of the focus group shared how their apprehensions were eased as the project continued. The greatest change occurred after lesson two "God's mission to the Oppressed." The researcher utilized several passages from the book of Exodus to highlight God's intentional mission toward those who were oppressed. The entire group agreed that this lesson was paramount to their transformation. The researcher discovered that the best method for transformation should educate, empower and edify. Hence, he proposed the following model for mission in the twenty-first century:



The researcher believes that when parishioners are educated, both biblically and otherwise, the fear and anxiety that comes with being missional diminishes. As a result the people are empowered. This education empowerment also aids in the development of leaders who are equipped to collaborate with the community and other social agencies thus creating a network of people and resources for the underprivileged. Finally, this model allows the best chance for transformation because it not only edifies those in the church, it also edifies those who are in the community by showing them that God is concerned about their plight. Therefore the possibility of edifying or growing exponentially becomes a reality.

Future Enhancements

Although the researcher was well pleased with the overall results he conferred with his context associates to ascertain what changes needed to take place to improve the proposed model and project. The following suggestions were given:

- “Spend more time defining and contrasting mission and missional.”
- “Include the entire village board of Trustees.”
- “Extend the sessions to at least 12 weeks.”
- “Preach more missional based sermons.”
- “Share the project with the minister alliance.”
- “Initiate collaboration between the church and other agencies and businesses within the community.”

- “Promote the annual village programs and events such as the back to school parade and rodeo.”
- “Participate in current revitalization by volunteering to sponsor the youth summer job program.”
- “Open our facilities for after school programs.”
- “Adopt one of the families who are living in poverty to insure that the kids have school uniforms and supplies.”

Conclusion

The compilation and analysis of the data collected from the questionnaires, surveys and interview proved that the project was a success. The researcher was impressed with the findings that showed a remarkable increase in the focus group understanding of being missional. However he was more pleased with the attitude change, which had been at best indifference, prior to the implementation of the project. The focus group was excited and motivated throughout the process. This was perhaps the greatest result because it piqued the interest of every member of the focus group. With that the researcher concluded that parishioners would do more when they are properly educated as it regards to God's mission.

Hence, both Greater Christian Unity Missionary Baptist and the village of Robbins, Illinois would benefit greatly from those who understand that the church and the community must collaborate in order for change to take place. The researcher further concluded that this research project not only transformed the focus group, it has also

transformed him. Subsequently, this will lead to the continued growth, both spiritually and physically of the church. Finally, this project proved that people living below the poverty level responded favorably to the invitation of salvation when mission was intentional and holistic.

APPENDIX A
PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC SHEET

Note: The information provided will remain confidential. The researcher and the Greater Christian Unity Missionary Baptist Church, located in Robbins, Illinois, will not share your information with any other agencies. Please circle your answer.

1. What is your gender? Male Female
2. What is your age? 18-25, 26-40, 41-55, over 55.
3. What is your highest level of education?
 - A. High School
 - B. Some college
 - C. College graduate
 - D. Graduate School
 - E. GED
4. What is your current employment status?
 - A. Employed
 - B. Unemployed
5. How long have you lived in Robbins? 0-5years, 6-10years, above 10 years
6. How long have you been a member of Greater Christian Unity? 0-5 years, above 5 years
7. Are you an active partner in the ministry?
8. Would you invite others to join this ministry?

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7. Are you an active partner in the ministry?
8. Would you invite others to join this ministry?

APPENDIX C

PRE AND POST SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

PRE AND POST SURVEY RESPONSES

Statement One: I belong to a missional church.

PRE	POST
Yes- 37%	Yes- 87%
No- 63%	No-13%

Statement Two: I am prepared for mission.

PRE	POST
Yes- 22%	Yes- 80%
No- 78%	No-20%

Statement Three: I can articulate God's mission.

PRE	POST
Yes- 28%	Yes- 90%
No- 72%	No-10%

Statement Four: I understand what it means to be holistic.

PRE	POST
Yes- 54%	Yes- 81%
No- 46%	No-19%

Statement Five: There should be collaboration between church and community.

PRE	POST
Yes- 68%	Yes- 90%
No- 32%	No-10%

Statement Six: Evangelism and mission are the same.

PRE	POST
Yes- 72%	Yes- 63%
No- 28%	No-37%

Statement Seven: Mission should be intentional.

PRE	POST
Yes- 81%	Yes- 100%
No- 19%	No-0%

Statement Eight: The church should be doing more as it pertains to the underprivileged.

PRE	POST
Yes- 78%	Yes- 86%
No- 22%	No-14%

APPENDIX D

BIBLE LESSONS OUTLINES

LESSON ONE

Knowing God's Mission

Isa. 61:1-4, Matt.25:31-46

1. Describe what is happening in both texts.
2. What is the prerequisite for doing mission?
3. What is the good news in both texts?
4. To whom is the prophet speaking? What about Matthew?
5. Compare the groups in both texts. What are the similarities and differences?
6. What name do Isaiah and Matthew give to those who accept the burden of ministry?
7. What name is given to those who fail to show compassion?
8. What group ultimately does the work in the Isaiah text?
9. How does Jesus measure the work of those who are called the righteous?
10. What eventually happens to those who continue to do ministry as usual, with no regard for the marginalized and oppressed in their community?

LESSON TWO

God's Mission to the Oppressed

Exodus 1:8, 2:23-25, 3:4-10, 4:10-17

1. What preconceptions and reservations do you have in regards to mission?
2. What was the cause of Israel's captivity?
3. What type of oppression were they facing?
4. What compelled God to act on their behalf?
5. Describe Moses call; how does he respond to God's missional call?
6. Was Moses response typical for Believers?
7. What action signifies God's concern for the oppressed and marginalized?
8. What did God do to help Moses overcome his insecurities?
9. What was the goal of this mission endeavor?
10. Who are the collaborators in this text?

LESSON THREE

The Biblical Mission of the Church

Matt.28:18-20, Mark 16:15, Luke 24:47, John, 20:21 Acts 2:42

The mission of the church cannot be understood without reference to the mission of Jesus Christ. The interrelated accounts of Jesus' last commissions does not mean that the church is free to construct its own in whatever way it chooses. It does mean that the church is called to interact in a profound and substantive way with the witness of the New Testament, and, open to and testing the movement of the Holy Spirit in its midst." The selected passages from each gospel, along with the Acts text highlights for us, the importance of Jesus' mission and subsequent commission to the disciples.

1. Discuss Jesus' commissioning of the disciples from each gospel writer. What are the constants in each account?
2. What are the dynamics of Matthew and the others?
3. Is there any involvement from God in any of these passages or is it all Jesus?
4. To whom are the disciples instructed to share the gospel?
5. What is the strategy for mission or where should it begin?
6. Does mission have any bearing on the physical and socioeconomic conditions of humanity; or is it directed only toward the spiritual?
7. Is there any collaboration in our passages? If so name the collaborators.
8. What was the response of those who heard the Apostle's teaching?
9. Do you think God's mission through Jesus has changed over the years?
10. Do you think we, as a church, are fulfilling Jesus' mission? If not what improvements should we make?

LESSON FOUR

Becoming a Missional Church Part 1

Genesis 3:1-9; Isaiah 6:1-8; John 1:11-14; John 3:16

God created humanity to be in relationship with him, unfortunately humanity has not always been obedient to God's word. Thus they have repeatedly broken the covenant. However, thankfully, this has not deterred God from rescuing humanity from their fallen condition. God loves humanity so dearly that God's mission continues even when humanity fails. Gen. 3:1-9

1. Which dynamics of mission are present in this text?
2. What is often the first response of the oppressed?
3. Where is God? What is God doing? Isa. 6:1-8
4. What obstacles did Isaiah have to overcome prior to mission?
5. What personal attributes did Isaiah possess?
6. What was God's mission for Isaiah? Jn. 1:11-14; 3:16
7. What compelled God's mission?
8. How did the people respond to God's plan?
9. What is the motivation for the Believers?
10. What is the common missional thread in these passages?

LESSON FIVE

Becoming a Missional Church part 2

Luke 14:13-21, 2Cor. 5:18-21, Hebrews 13:1-3, James 2:1-7

Jesus' special concern for the poor extended to all the marginalized, weak and socially ostracized. In contrast to his contemporaries, Jesus demonstrated a special interest in the disabled, children, drunkards, prostitutes and lepers. If the church is going to impact her community for Christ, she must emulate Christ by being missional.

Read Luke 14:13-21

1. Who was the intended audience?
2. Which group accepted the invitation?
3. What type(s) of audience do you encounter on a daily basis?
4. What type of effort does the servant put forth?

Read 2 COR .5:18-21 Hebrews 13:1-3

5. What title is used to describe God's servant (s)?
6. What is his task in God's mission?
7. What is your understanding of reconciliation?
8. How should we greet others, especially those who are oppressed?
9. What groups are we exhorted to remember?

Read James 2:1-7

10. What major issue should we avoid as it pertains to being missional?
11. Which group is more prone to ridicule?
12. What, if any missional techniques (persuasion) have you attempted to employ?

LESSON SIX

The Missional Church at Work

Matt. 15:32-38; Mark 6:7-12; Acts 15:23-28; Romans 12:1-2

God's ultimate mission is to redeem humanity from its fallen condition. God orchestrates God's mission by sending Christ to be not only our sacrificial lamb but our example as well. Hence the mission of the church cannot be fully understood without some knowledge of Jesus' personal ministry and the affect it had on both the disciples and the early church.

Read Matt. 15:32-38

1. What else, besides love, compels Jesus to show favor to those in need?
2. What is Jesus' response to the Disciples question?
3. What made this mission successful?

Read Mark 6:7-12

4. What was the goal of this missional endeavor?
5. Why in your estimation are the Disciples instructed to take nothing but a walking stick; and to wear a single cloak and sandals?
6. How should we respond when people do not care to hear us?

Read Acts 15:23-28

7. As we participate in God's mission what tendency should we avoid at all times?
8. What normally happens when there is an imposition of church dogma?

Read Romans 12:1-2

9. Mission/Worship involves many sacrifices. What is the ultimate sacrifice?
10. What pleases God the most as it pertains to our six week study on developing a missional church?

APPENDIX E
EXIT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Exit Interview Questionnaire

The researcher performed an exit interview, (Appendix E), to obtain suggestions and further feedback regarding the success of his project. The group was asked to be honest and respectful. To expedite the process the researcher posed the following questions:

1. How can the community improve its reputation?
2. What can the church(s) do to assist the poor in the community?
3. How can the members get involved?
4. What can be done to improve the services in the village?
5. What role if any does the Pastor have in improving conditions in the village?
6. What can the church do to make sure that future parishioners understand the importance of collaboration between church and community?

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